

PULLING DOWN THE HOUSE AND TEARING UP THE  
YARD: CONSTRUCTING, POLICING, AND CONTAINING  
BLACK MASCULINITY, 1920-1960

Kimberly M. Stanley

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of History and the Department of American Studies  
Indiana University

July 2015

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Doctoral Committee

---

Claude Clegg, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

Vivian Halloran, Ph.D., Co-Chairperson

---

Wendy Gamber, Ph.D.

---

Matthew Guterl, Ph.D.

---

Marissa Moorman, Ph. D.

---

Khalil Muhammad, Ph. D.

November 10, 2014

Copyright © 2015  
Kimberly M. Stanley

To All My Relations...

## Acknowledgements

Today, as I write what I hope is my final version of my “Acknowledgments,” I am still in a phase of disbelief that this particular journey is now over. Graduate school and the process of writing a dissertation are experiences that I will not soon forget. I had days filled with anxiety, doubt, and loneliness. Yet, there were also countless days filled with renewed invigoration, determination, motivation, and beautiful conversations that inspired me to press on. There are so many individuals that mentored and guided me through this process by their words and deeds, and for that I am extremely grateful.

First and foremost, I wish to thank my committee for their guidance and patience. Claude Clegg was not only an amazing committee chair, but also a supportive and encouraging advisor. My first year at Indiana University was quite difficult. Although I had arrived in Bloomington with a master’s degree in-hand, the thoughts of completing coursework, getting a Ph.D., and balancing my home and personal life with school were overwhelming. I wanted to quit. I would arrive at Professor Clegg’s office door teary-eyed and feeling defeated, telling him how I just did not think I was cut-out for this. He would listen, offer me Kleenex, assure me that I could finish, and suggest I come back in three weeks to revisit my decision. I would return three weeks later, teary-eyed and lacking confidence. He, again, would suggest that I come back three weeks later. This went on for some time and then the tone, topic, and purpose of our meetings changed. I still presented myself teary-eyed, and he was always handy with an endless supply of Kleenex, but we began to discuss my interest in black masculinity and this man named Dan Burley who I found while researching black cheesecake magazines. I knew early on that I

wanted to write about Burley and black masculinity, and Professor Clegg was encouraging, albeit a bit skeptical of my seemingly impetuous decision to pick a dissertation topic so early in my studies at IU. I recall him asking if I liked my project because I was going to have to live with it for a very long time. I assured him I did, and since then his support has been unwavering. He challenged me to think about the broader implications of my topic, to expand my focus from just a biography—my original plan, and, most importantly, to see myself as a historian.

Vivian Nun Halloran kept me focused and insisted that I consider other frameworks and perspectives in my analysis of my sources, much to my dismay. Of course, she was right. She and her husband David helped me hash out ideas about this project long before I was in the writing phase. David Halloran offered suggestions, encouragement, and personal anecdotes when I felt that this project was too daunting. It was in Marissa Moorman's class that I began to think about contextualizing masculinity. She provided resources and prodded me to think about the performance of masculinity within the diaspora and culture. Khalil Gibran Muhammad kept me on task by constantly asking, "Where is Burley?" Along with being a member of this committee, Khalil became a thoughtful friend. He and his wonderful wife, Stephanie, opened their hearts and home to me and mine on the holidays. I will always cherish those times.

Matthew Guterl offered critical feedback and support. He modeled—daily—how to be successful in academia both professionally and personally. Lastly, I wish to thank Wendy Gamber. I truly benefitted from Indiana University changing their policy regarding dissertation committee members, which allowed me to ask Wendy to be on my committee! I met Wendy long before I set foot on IU's campus and I value every encounter I have had with her.

There are several professors at Indiana University who offered feedback on my dissertation, suggestions that aided me in thinking about my work, or just checked-in to see how I was doing. Nick Cullather graciously read chapters of my dissertations and provided typed feedback from his old-school typewriter! Jason McGraw, Arlene Diaz, and John Bodnar allowed me to bend their ear and suggested texts that could help me frame my argument. And, my heartfelt-thanks to Michelle Moyd, Leah Shopkow, Eric Sandweiss, Ben Eklof, Anne Carmichael, Mari Bucur, Konstantin Dierks, and Peter Guardino, Valerie Grim, Vernon Williams, John McCluskey, Audrey McCluskey, Portia Maulsby, and Purnima Bose for always offering kind words of encouragement.

The project could not have come to fruition without the assistance of several individuals and institutions. This dissertation began as a seed of an idea in Joanne Meyerowitz's Gender and Sexuality seminar class. Professor Meyerowitz found source material for my seminar paper when I found myself at dead-ends when researching *Duke* magazine and Dan Burley. And, because of Professor Meyerowitz's tenacity, connections, and letting fellow scholars know that she had a student interested in researching Burley, I was subsequently linked to individuals who were interested in black periodicals, Burley, and the Chicago Renaissance. The Kinsey Institute was one of the many "homes" I occupied for several years, spending countless hours there perusing magazines, newspapers, and indexes in search of anything that mentioned *Duke*, Burley, black sexuality, or blacks in World War II. Shawn C. Wilson and his staff were always gracious and helpful, especially when I would arrive ten minutes before closing. Shawn was also one of the countless individuals who provided support by inviting me to "Martini Mondays," which were great early-week stress relievers. While researching and writing at the Kinsey, I met

Elizabeth (Liz) O’Gorek. It was refreshing to meet, talk, and work alongside someone who was also writing on masculinity. Our conversations and exchange of resources and ideas kept me motivated. This dissertation also benefited from the resources available in the Vivian G. Harsh Collection at the Chicago Public Library and the generosity of archivists Michael Flug and Beverly Cook. And, of course, I am extremely fortunate that Indiana University has such amazing libraries with invaluable resources.

There is a special bond formed between individuals who come together to write or just commune in order to keep each other motivated and sane. Thank you to Writing Tutorial Services for establishing the dissertation writing group. The weekly meetings forced me to establish and set goals, a habit that definitely helped me finish, and Holly Schreiber was an exceptional group leader. Joanne Quimby, Adrienne Wadewitz, Sunitha Chitrapu, Jennifer Kaladow, Kate Schroeder, Frederica Hadley, Grant Simpson, Brooke Treadwell, Aaron Loehrlein, Nicki Gerlach, Sara Beth Tomsyck, Aysegul Oz, Jose Espericueta, Andrew Barrett, and Paul Toth gave me great advice on how to juggle life and graduate school. But, more importantly, they provided a safe space for healing and acceptance during those many times that I thought this journey was impossible to complete. Although we never had “formal” arrangements, walking into the library and seeing my fellow colleagues working on their dissertations or research provided comfort and camaraderie as we journeyed on our very unique but similar paths. To Michael Anklin, Jamie Warren, Mayumi Hoshino, Flory Gingging, Susan Eckelmann, Jose Najar, Aimee Dobbs, Nicole McGrath Warren, Sandrine Catris, Kathleen (Kathi) Fox, Chrystine Keener, Siobhan Carter-David, and Jennifer Stinson, I would like to extend a special thanks for being present in those familiar spaces.



During my time at Indiana University, I was granted some amazing opportunities. I worked for the *Journal of American History*, and I taught for and was mentored by some great professors. Thank you to the *JAH* staff: Edward Linenthal, Stephen Andrews, Aidan Smith, Nic Champagne, Ben Ullrich, Melissa Beaver, Penny Dillon, Charles Fish, Nancy Croker, Karen Dunak, Jennifer Stinson, Tanisha Ford, Donna Drucker, Elizabeth Marsh, Angel Flores-Rodriguez, Deneise Self, Kevin Marsh, Susan Armeny, and Shannon Smith for making my time there a memorable and an educational experience. As an associate instructor in the Department of History and American Studies I learned a great deal about teaching from Konstantin Dierks, Jason McGraw, and especially Wendy Gamber and Nick Cullather. Many thanks to Charles Frederick, Arlene Diaz, John Nieto-Phillips, and Sylvia Martinez for giving me the opportunity to teach my own courses, and Myrna Garcia, Mintzi Martinez-Rivera, Julian Carrillo, Anna Luna, Joanna Moya, and Teresa Garcia, who were amazing folks to work alongside.

I must acknowledge the administrative staff in History, American Studies, and Latino Studies, all of whom kept me on track and oriented in this crazy bureaucracy, and always had a kind word. Thank you to Becky Bryant, Jo Ellen Fitzgerald, Deana Hutchins, Sara Skinner, Astra Irmeja-Sefere, Blake Harvey, Paula Cotner, Micaela Richter, Nick Roberts, Nancy Ashley, and especially Alexia Bock. I can honestly say, without fear of hyperbole, that Alexia is truly one of my lifesavers (okay, maybe not a “lifesaver”) but she most definitely came to my rescue several times. I am so fortunate to know her and I feel extremely grateful that I can call her friend.

As I reflect on my time in graduate school and in Bloomington, I am overwhelmed by the communities that were formed and welcomed me and mine. Carl Suddler, Tanisha C. Ford, Siobhan Carter-David, Carol Bennett, Amani Marshall, Anthony Dixon, Danton Wims, Muzi

Hadebe, Amrita Myers, Justin Ellison, Natalie Gwishiri, and David Jamison will always have a special place in my heart. The community we formed inside and outside of Ballantine Hall have sustained me. To April Smith, Byron Craig, Darran Mosley, Jeanelle Crouch, Daniel Orr, Carrie Plemmons, Susan Williams, Maria Duarte, Anvi Hoang, Jessica Leach, Justin Ellison, Erin Corber, LaNita Campbell, Katie Campbell, Mary Wiggins, Carrie Plemmons, Susan Bradford, Nicole Bolden, Frank Motley, Valerie Haughton-Motley, Giovanna Urdangarain, Filieve Palmer, Joseph Stahlman, Brian McQueen, Shayla Lawson, Arwen Jamison, Candis Smith, Sarah Rahrig, Jolanta Mickute, Anna Muller, Stephanie Singleton, Alandra Harris-Hasan, Rafi Hasan, Roberta Radovich, Walton Muyumba, June Evans, Scot Brown, Reva Sherman, Sean Clark, and Christopher Michael Brown, thank you all for providing the free therapy, picnics, cookouts, dance parties, drinks, and balance needed to help me get this task completed. Speaking of balance: A huge thank you to my CrossFit family—CrossFit Bloomington and Stonebreakers Athletics (Carl Suddler, LaNita Campbell, Jennifer Boles, Kim Crane, Hannah Hirsch, Jennifer Agnew Chonowski, Alice Kay Hui, Quentin Speight).

Prior to arriving in Bloomington and at Indiana University, I had a wonderful group of mentors and friends who encouraged me to continue on my academic journey. When I was at the University of New Mexico, Minrose Gwin, Ruth Salvaggio, Eric Porter, Wesley Chenault, Gwen Hunnicutt, and Celia Naylor offered me great advice and encouragement (and still do). I know for certain I would have never been in graduate school if it had not been for the guidance and encouragement of Gerald Davis. He was my first graduate school advisor and set an amazing standard. I miss him terribly. M. Jane Young stepped in once Gerry passed away. She had remarkable shoes to fill and she was exceptional. Tyrone Stewart, Valerie Drue, Kellie

Bryant Fowler, Corina Diaz Zubiarte, Jody Antal, Daniel Kerlinsky, Joanne Hawkins, Lydia Guzman, Linda Marshall, Elwyn Thompson, and Kevin Dolan offered encouragement and a sympathetic ear. I owe a lot to my undergraduate professors from Gannon University, as well. Thanks to William (Bill) Doan and A. J. Miceli!

And, finally, I must give thanks to my family. I am very much aware of whose shoulders' I stand. My mother and father, Betty Jean and William Stanley, Jr offered support (in deeds, money, and words) despite not knowing the rigors of what it takes to complete a "paper." I wish to thank my brother and sister, Will and Karen, for offering me laughter and opening their homes for weekend getaways. My cousins: Eric Hunt, Mia Hunt, Bryant K. Woodford, Derrick F. Woodford, and Erika Woodford—you all inspire me and make me better. My aunts and uncles: Tina and Emmanuel Hunt, Frank and Patricia Woodford, Gloria and Willie J. Woodford, and Louise Few—thank you for guiding, schooling, and encouraging me. To my greats—Dorothy (who once told me I could take a break from graduate school, but I better not quit), Mildred, Willie Pearl, and Mattie—thank you for the stories. Your beautiful stories. And, to those who started me on this journey, but did not live to see it complete: My grandparents, Lueraine Stanley, Ellen J. Woodford, and Elsie Woodford; my cousin, James E. Few; my great-aunts Ella and Frances Hall; and my great-uncles Johnny Woodford, William Woodford, and Elijah Woodford. Your memory and spiritual presence kept me going. Although not family, Dawn Deanna Dayhoff provided stability, comfort, and the push I needed—so much more than a cheerleader. I appreciate you immensely. Sadie and Basie proved more human than dog—daily—and offered unconditional love constantly. And, of course, Jordan—my reason. J has

been my constant companion since the day she was born. She has tolerated her wanderlust mom with great humor and resiliency—thank goodness! I love this child of mine!

If there is anyone I forgot, please chalk it up to my head (and my bad memory) and not my heart. I acknowledge each and every soul that I have encountered during this journey.

Kimberly M. Stanley  
Bloomington, IN  
July 7, 2015

Kimberly M. Stanley

PULLING DOWN THE HOUSE AND TEARING UP THE YARD:  
CONSTRUCTING, POLICING AND CONTAINING BLACK MASCULINITY, 1920-1960

“Pulling Down the House and Tearing Up the Yard: Constructing, Policing and Containing Black Masculinity, 1920-1960” explores the role of the black press, black lifestyle magazines, and selected journalists and publishers in the discursive construction of black middle-class masculinity during the 1920s to the 1960s in order to advance the cause of racial equality. Journalists and publishers, acting as civil rights agents, re-imagined and reconstructed ideal representations *and* representatives of black manhood and disseminated these images in their respective publications so that ordinary black citizens, or the “submerged tenth,” would emulate behaviors deemed appropriate and respectable. As a result, those individuals whose behaviors were unrespectable, and thus deemed detrimental to the cause of racial uplift, were marginalized and policed.

At the core of this work is the question, “How did cultural producers continue to re-imagine the New Negro?” This project does not assume that a static form of black masculinity was generally received as emblematic of the race; rather, it posits that African American cultural producers and the black community, in general, held malleable assumptions about respectability and masculinity during any given era. Thus, explicit in this examination is that masculinity, or rather *masculinities*, were unstable qualities of maleness, subject to historical and cultural contexts as well as media manipulation and political maneuvering.

---

Claude Clegg, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

Vivian Halloran, Ph.D., Co-Chairperson

---

Wendy Gamber, Ph.D.

---

Matthew Guterl, Ph.D.

---

Marissa Moorman, Ph.D.

---

Khalil Muhammad, Ph.D.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	1
Chapter 1: Building the House: Constructing a New Negro.....	15
Chapter 2: Racing the Field .....	80
Chapter 3: Behind Every Good Man .....	122
Chapter 4: <i>Ebony</i> and <i>Our World</i> : Manliness Made in Flight .....	177
Chapter 5: Dan, Duke, and Re/Presenting the New New Negro .....	240
Conclusion.....	309
Bibliography.....	315

Curriculum Vitae

## INTRODUCTION

Prior to Jackie Robinson officially integrating Major League baseball in 1947 and being signed to the minors in 1945, black journalists had already started to encourage major league owners to sign black players. The integration of baseball would be a symbolic gesture that many hoped would translate into economic, political, and social fair play for African Americans within American society. Black journalists knew that there were Negro League players good enough to play in the Majors, Satchel Paige being a prime example. Sports columnists, such as Dan Burley, worked publicly and behind the scenes to force major league team owners to offer tryouts to black players. It had been the opinion of Branch Rickey that a certain type of black man was needed to integrate baseball—not necessarily the best baseball player, although he needed to possess “superior skills.” But, more importantly, this representative man needed to “maintain his talents at a competitive peak while withstanding pressure and abuse. . . [and]. . . self-control to avoid reacting to tormentors without sacrificing his dignity.”<sup>1</sup> With Robinson selected as the model candidate, possessing the proper skills, qualifications, and deportment, the next phase in the “great experiment” was to shore up black fans who would also need to embody restraint and respectability in order for integration to be successful.

In September 1945, prior to the public knowing that Rickey, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, had already decided to sign Robinson, Burley, in his sports column “Confidentially Yours,” worked to influence another change—the rowdiness of black baseball fans. Burley was concerned that the behavior of fans at Negro League games might cause park owners to ban future games, and, more than likely, fearful that these public displays of unruliness would give Rickey, and other Major League owners, pause or, worse yet, reason to renege in signing a black

---

<sup>1</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York, 2008), 58.



player. In “Rowdyism At Our Ball Games Must Go!,” Burley wrote that the “Rowdy players who attack umpires with bats, knives, and their fists find their counterpart in the stands. There you see women fighting each other, men knocking women down, and brawl springing up all over during the progress of the game.”<sup>2</sup> Burley reprimanded African Americans for exhibiting classless and unrespectable behavior in public where “they fight, cuss, knife each other, drink liquor, and carry on in an outlandish manner, making people wonder why in the hell do I have to be identified with such a race of people?” Still, in Burley’s estimation it was not solely that these “senseless brawls” were reprehensible and a source of shame to the race, or even that they took “place in the presence of white ushers, park attendants, gatekeepers, and white fans,” but “it hurt because we have not learned how to behave in public.”<sup>3</sup>

Burley placed the majority of the blame on recent black southern migrants who now occupied northern metropolises like New York, Cleveland, and Chicago, and “have not had a chance to learn how to act in public, certainly not at a baseball game” and on the hoodlum elements that had already existed in these cities. Together, he insisted, “they combine into a formidable threat to the future well-being of Negro baseball by duplicating all the disreputable and unseemly habits of the ignorant and uncouth in public.”<sup>4</sup> Black men who “use[d] baseball games as a place to sell whiskey” were of concern. Although the extralegal activity provided income and pejoratively factored them as enterprising and participating in the consumer-based economy, these men publicly presented themselves as not adhering to codes dictated by their new homeland. The assumed refusal to seek reputable employment along with the selling and

---

<sup>2</sup> Dan Burley, “Confidentially Yours: Rowdyism at Our Ball Games Must Go!” *The New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 1, 1945, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Burley, “Rowdyism,” 8.

<sup>4</sup> Burley, “Rowdyism,” 8.

presumed manufacturing of alcohol placed the “hoodlum element” and recent southern male migrants firmly outside of tenets of black northern masculinity.

Nevertheless, what was most disconcerting for Burley was the behavior of black women. He lamented that “the women who bring whiskey to parks and drink out in the open should be barred.” In another “Confidentially Yours,” published two weeks later, “Women Key to Bad Acting at Our Ball Games,” Burley continued his lashing, stating “the finger is pointing at our women at being the top bad actors at ball games and other public affairs.” He was specifically referring to the game between the Homestead Grays and the New York Cubans where several black women who were seated behind home plate had come to the game “formidably prepared with four or five bottles of whiskey.” As the game progressed, one of the women, who drank her whiskey from a “brown paper bag,” “engaged in raucous laughter, explosive and vile profanity and [...] made many fans wish they were at home, despite the excellence of the game.”<sup>5</sup> In Burley’s opinion “this woman was one of a dozen or more who by this sort of conduct hurt baseball, the cause of the race, and everything in general.”<sup>6</sup> Burley’s preoccupation with policing the behavior of women in public spaces, more so than black men, was based on his belief that “men of every race, including Negro men, are unconsciously governed by what their women want. . . womanhood is supreme on the altar of most races of civilized status and the . . . dignity ascribed to women is one of the main reasons for the progress of the world.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, if womanhood set the standards for civility, and black women would not or could not adhere to codes of respectability, then the race, as a whole, was also deemed uncivilized and unworthy of full citizenship. Furthermore, such public performances disrupted gender norms.

---

<sup>5</sup> Burley, “Rowdyism,” 8; Dan Burley, “Confidentially Yours: Women Key to Bad Acting at Our Ball Games,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 15, 1945, A11.

<sup>6</sup> Burley, “Women Key,” A11.

<sup>7</sup> Burley, “Women Key,” A11.

Public intoxication and the use of profanity, albeit deemed unrespectable, were coded behaviors with gendered consequences. The selling and drinking of liquor, gambling, and the use of profanity, behaviors culturally coded as masculine, were oftentimes deemed rites of passages for men and allowed for the modification and complexity of male identity. However, when performed by women, these behaviors were judged unlady-like. Clear distinctions needed to be made and adhered to in a utopian society in order for duties to be performed. Burley wrote that “when our women allow themselves to become loose, coarse and vulgar, whether in public or in private, they generate the ingredients of disrespect from their men to tangible form.” Because these women had not adhered to codes of black respectability and socialized with the “street corner loafer, the poolroom hustler, or the would-be pimp,” he, in turn, “gets more confidence himself and is soon insulting all women and young girls.” Black women behaving badly negatively impacted the perception of black manhood and unduly influenced and defined qualities of black masculinity.<sup>8</sup> Further, women behaving as men disrupted balance and challenged masculinity. Heteronormative society dictated that men behave as dominant and aggressive, and women were to be submissive and genteel. Black women acting as men disrupted gendered norms, conjured up images of “old” stereotypes and beliefs regarding African American conduct, and put in question the authority of African American men.

Burley impressed upon his readers that the southern, primitive behavior presented by black women at these games was detrimental to the overall cause of racial equality and “something should be done about it and right away.” He insisted the key to shoring up this segment of the population must “be done by missionary work; by employment of women

---

<sup>8</sup> Burley, “Women Key,” A11.

policemen, by promoters of ball games especially and by continually shaming such bad-actors into a change in ways.”<sup>9</sup>

Arguably, Burley was invested in policing and containing black female respectability primarily to ensure the integration of baseball, but also to help construct and bolster black masculinity. The constructing, containing, and policing of black respectability was just one of the myriad strategies associated with achieving full citizenship. African Americans needed to perform and demonstrate, via behavior and skill, that similar to black baseball players, that they were ready for integration. Hence, uncouth or behaviors judged as unrefined or nonconformist to modern or northern ideals were labeled “old-fashioned,” which was code for southern. Burley’s articles provided a direct link between “old-fashioned” and modern. Curiously, it was not the rowdiness that was of utmost concern, but the public engagement of cultural expression and food ways in the presence of whites that was so bothersome. In “Rowdyism,” Burley conflated those African Americans who brought “dinners to ball games” with those who smuggled and sold whiskey. He wrote that “it wouldn’t do much harm to get rid of the old fashioned people who bring their dinner to the ball park, as I have seen on a number of occasions.” Similar to women who brought and drank whiskey to ball games, old-fashioned people—or those black individuals who engaged in practices marked southern—should also be excluded from certain privileges.

The conflation of disruptive behavior and cultural practices and their implication for African American citizenship was addressed in another of Burley’s “Confidentially Yours.” In an August 1947 column, subtitled “Still More Work Needed—In Stands,” Burley, in a sense, was trying to quell racial tensions that were taking place on and off the field at Dodger games now that Robinson was on the roster. Burley reassured baseball fans that Robinson was “doing all

---

<sup>9</sup> Burley, “Women Key,” A11.

right,” but it was “Big Mouth Mamie and Old Fashioned Moses” who was “still making up the biggest threat to the well-being of the present Hamitic big leaguers and those poised on the runways for tomorrow entries.”<sup>10</sup> Big Mouth Mamie and Old Fashioned Moses, in Burley’s opinion, did not understand the fair play of baseball. In “Still More Work,” Burley explained that baseball, similar to life, was about fair play, and one must not always think in racial terms. Although Robinson “has been mixed up in a hard slide” or “has been hit fairly frequently by pitched balls—seven or eight so far,” fans should not assume that his white opponents were targeting him because of his race.

Mamie and Moses, who were new to the North and had yet to rid themselves of their southern sensibilities, lacked the preparedness and understanding for integration. Besides reacting emotionally, rushing the field, and not comprehending the rules of fair play, Burley felt there was still more work to be done in policing black behavior:

this discourse is to point out further that there’s a lot of work to be done in educating those who are already newly converted big league fans and those thousands who will get interested in the future on how to behave themselves. At their worst, watermelon eaters, chicken bone cleaners and those who bring baskets of barbecue can only instill disgust and derision, but those who get emotionally upset to the point where they might cause trouble are the real ones to guard against.<sup>11</sup>

Such images, although regionally specific, historically and globally held power and marked African Americans as unfit for full inclusion. Thus, it was the similarities in behavior, such as African Americans’ love of baseball and the modeling of appropriate heteronormativity, that Burley wanted to stress during such a crucial time. The end of World War II was the striking point to push for the integration of America’s most favorite past time. According to sports

---

<sup>10</sup> Dan Burley, “Confidentially Yours: Still More Work Needed—in Stands,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 16, 1947, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Burley, “Still Some Work,” 8.

historian Jules Tygiel, the War, “more than any other event, caused Americans to re-evaluate their racial attitudes.” Considered a “watershed moment in the struggle for civil rights,” World War II “exposed the contradictions of racial practices in the United States.” The end of the war presented yet another opportunity for journalists to reimagine African American citizenship and strategies on how best to acquire civil rights.<sup>12</sup> However, the threat of unruly behavior lessened the opportunity for whites to see the similarities between the races. If old-fashioned behaving blacks did not adhere to proscribed values, those who were more progressive and modern, including the New Negro, would put them on notice.

I begin my discussion on the construction, containment, and policing of black masculinity with this anecdote for multiple reasons. First, it is a fine example of the effectiveness of the black press in informing and influencing the behavior of the black community. There is no dearth of literature that documents the role of the black press in its usefulness to African Americans, especially during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> The black press was influential in promoting black migration north, helping blacks find jobs, voicing its opinion on black involvement during World War I and World War II, articulating a civil rights ethos, serving as a familial and community resource, and, “influenc[ing]...political elections.”<sup>14</sup> Thus more than a news and protest organ that privileged the black community, the black press functioned, in a

---

<sup>12</sup> Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> See Charles A. Simmons *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises, with Special Reference to Four Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, 1998). But, of course, the “amount” and the vastness of the scholarship, as well as what is deemed research on the black press is relative. In 1968 when Henry La Brie began the research for his dissertation, “A Profile of the Black Newspaper: Old Guard Black Journalist Reflect on the Past, Present and Future,” there was a dearth of information. According to La Brie, there was less “than a half dozen” biographies and books chronicling the history and contributions of black journalists and black newspapers. However, post-1968 the scholarship has grown in the form of biography, monographs, and indexes. See Henry La Brie, “A Profile of the Black Newspaper: Old Guard Black Journalists Reflect on the Past, Present, and Future” (Ph. D. diss., University of Iowa, 1973), 1.

<sup>14</sup> La Brie, “A Profile in Black Newspapers,” 36.

sense, as a transcendental mirror—a place and a space that responded to and reflected the psychic, social, political and cultural circumstance of its readership.

Secondly, it exposes the anxieties and hopes that journalists felt at this crucial moment in history. The end of World War II, as well as other historical ruptures, were critical moments where cultural producers reimagined and reconceptualized African American manhood and citizenship.<sup>15</sup> This example from Burley and the *New York Amsterdam News* demonstrates how black publications and other cultural products constructed and policed behaviors in their hopes to contain ideal notions of masculinity and femininity. The containment of female behavior, as Burley asserted, directly impacted how black men were perceived. Furthermore, it established the competing masculinities and femininities that coexisted, and how Burley believed it was necessary to shore up the race in performing a black middle-class respectability in order to achieve racial equality.

“Pulling Down the House and Tearing Up the Yard: Constructing, Policing and Containing Black Masculinity, 1920-1960” examines how the black press, black lifestyle magazines, and select journalists and publishers discursively constructed black middle-class masculinity. I argue that cultural producers, being informed by the historical moment,

---

<sup>15</sup> For this project, manhood and manliness refer to an individual’s performed embodiment of traits perceived as belonging to male identity. In Gail Bederman’s *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*, she asserts that manhood is culturally, contextually, and historically defined. According to Bederman, by 1890 the term “masculinity” began to replace “manhood” as the term that linked “genital anatomy to male identity, and linking both anatomy and identity to a particular arrangements of authority and power,” which “convey[ed] the new attributes of powerful manhood. . . middle-class men were working to synthesize.” Bederman writes that although “historians use the term ‘manly’ and ‘masculine’ interchangeably. . . the two words carried quite different connotations throughout the nineteenth century.” Manly “had a moral dimension. . . what is noble in man or worthy of manhood.” Manliness, however, was understood to mean, “all the worthy, moral attributes which the Victorian middle class admired in a man.” Such qualities include, “sexual restraint, a powerful will, strong character.” For this project, masculinity will also be used interchangeably when addressing an individual performance of manhood and it will also connote the spectrum of performances. See, Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, 1995), 6, 8, 18; and Anna Pochmara, *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2011), 10, 22.

disseminated to their audience ideal notions and representations of black masculinity. Explicit in this examination is that masculinity, or rather *masculinities*, do not represent a static notion of maleness but rather masculinity is contextually constructed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson explained in their introduction to *Constructing Masculinity* that “it is no longer possible simply to declare one’s manhood as a form of identity politics. Masculinity, the asymmetrical pendant to the more critically investigated femininity, is a vexed term, variously inflected, multiply defined, not limited to straightforward description of maleness.”<sup>16</sup> Following the lead of feminist studies, social scientists and historians have begun to investigate masculinity as a construct—and I would add, a constructed “product”—one that is mediated by citizenship, race, class, sexuality, culture, and the historical moment. Thus, this dissertation examines the ways in which black middle-class masculinity was reimagined and reconstituted in the black press and lifestyle magazines during the 1920s through the 1960s as a means of achieving racial equality.

I anchor my investigation in black publications for several reasons. As stated, black publications were very influential in not only the dissemination of “news,” but also, I argue, the propagation of appropriate behavior. Envisioning their readership as an “imagined community” that ascribed to the same values and codes of respectability and masculinity, cultural producers—such as Dan Burley, Robert Abbott (publisher of the *Chicago Defender*) and John H. Johnson (founder of the Johnson Publishing Company)—took it upon themselves to imagine, encourage, and even model acceptable forms of masculinity through personification and their publications.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, *Constructing Masculinity* (New York, 1995), 2.

<sup>17</sup> I am using Benedict Anderson’s thesis of imagined communities as a framework to analyze how black journalists and cultural producers conceptualized their readership as well as the connection between language and nationalism. See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 1991).



Acting as racial activists, cultural producers shared their vision of what type of representation would best uplift the race and hence provide access to racial equality.

This dissertation addresses black representation and visibility. Along with examining how masculinity was constructed, I explore *who* cultural producers believed personified ideal black masculinity, as well as the language and images used to define distinct black masculinity. African American cultural producers and the black community had assumptions about respectability and masculinity during any given era and were invested in its visibility, believing that it was through appropriate demonstrations of respectability, representation, and black leadership (read male) that blacks would achieve racial equality and equal citizenship. Hence, this inquiry will not only question notions of “manhood,” but also take into account how cultural mediators used notions of gender, race, and class to construct or challenge black masculinity. Indeed, this dissertation examines how black publications and their creators were invested and challenged representations of black masculinity and *femininity* for the purposes of uplift and racial equality.

As stated, this project investigates the period between the 1920s and the 1960s. Mainly regarded as the beginning of the black literary arts movement, the 1920s allowed for the artistic expression of black identity, the reconstitution of black middle-class values, and the reimagining of black masculinity. Cultural producers of the Harlem Renaissance rebelled against “traditional” notions of black masculinity that had been stressed by prior generations.<sup>18</sup> Alain Locke’s seminal text, *The New Negro*, is a good example of how a cultural producer created or edited a cultural product, in this instance a text, from which the discursive identity of the New Negro emerged.

---

<sup>18</sup> Martin Summers asserts that one of the characteristics of the Harlem Renaissance is that it allowed a new generation of black men the opportunity to diverge from Victorian notions of manliness and articulate their manhood via consumption, production, and sexuality. Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class & The Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill, 2004).

The Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro are intricately linked; each responsible for the creation and buttressing of the other. Still, one of the most explicit assertions of the New Negro Movement was to distance the New Negro from what was perceived to be the “old” Negro. Hence, the New Negro that emerged was crafted in juxtaposition to the “old” Negro, a constructed as well as a performed identity.<sup>19</sup>

The 1920s marked not only a cultural turning point for African Americans but also, according to Locke, a psychological (re)awakening. This metamorphosis or sudden change in attitude of African Americans was due, in part, to the migration of many blacks from the south to the north and the pronouncement that the “Old Negro...was more myth than man...[he] was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy.”<sup>20</sup> According to Locke, the Negro contributed to the myth of the “old Negro” through the “social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet, the Harlem Renaissance, as a cultural movement, was geared toward the black elite. Many of the black literati of the Harlem Renaissance were college educated and the patronage that they received in order to produce their art often came from white benefactors. Hence, this movement excluded the majority of blacks from participating in their own advancement. Nevertheless, many of the codes and symbols representative of uplift—consumerism, modernity, self-determinism, and the apparent rejection of Victorian values—proliferated within the black community. Migration, in a sense, was a symbolic first step in southern blacks’ willingness to transform from a dependent “old negro,” to a self-determined “new Negro.” This demonstration,

---

<sup>19</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>20</sup> Alain Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York, 1997), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Locke, 3.

which had been promoted by the black press, allowed blacks who had been marginalized by the renaissance movement to actively contribute in their own self-determination and uplift.

Still, the massive influx of southerners to New York and Chicago gave certain areas of the community a “decidedly southern overlay.”<sup>22</sup> During World War I era, close to a half-million blacks migrated to northern cities such as Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, New York and Chicago, with the Windy City’s black population increasing almost 150 percent between 1910 and 1920.<sup>23</sup> Their resettlement from the south to the north only confirmed the press-fulfilling prophecy that the north was the land of opportunity and of a land of racial progress. Black journalists who worked for the *Amsterdam-Star News* and the *Chicago Defender*, acting as uplift agents and social reformers, provided tools that would help recent migrants adapt socially, politically, and culturally to their new environment. Cultural producers, believing that integration and racial equality rested not just in the north, but on a black northern sensibility, attempted to shore-up this imagined community, via signs and symbols, by affirming and promoting behavior and rituals emblematic of ideal manhood, and denouncing and policing behaviors that were seen as detrimental to the race.

I argue that the 1930s also marked a shift in how the press constructed and represented black masculinity. As discussed, with the onset of migration, cultural producers attempted to create, police, and maintain a sense of urbane masculinity within the northern metropolises in efforts to use and include all blacks, not just the elite, in the fight for racial equality. Regionalism, self-determination, and an urban sensibility would be the keys to citizenship. The 1930s, however, witnessed another transition of ideal masculinity. Although the press still impressed upon their readers the need to contain their own behavior and police their neighbor’s,

---

<sup>22</sup> David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York, 1997), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Levering Lewis, 20.

the press overwhelmingly began to use sports icons such as Joe Louis and Jesse Owens as men demonstrating ideal black masculinity.

Politics of the body were contested terrain in the fight for civil rights. Notions of respectability called for the containment of the body in certain circumstances. Sports were one of the few arenas in which black men, to some extent, could demonstrate their athletic equality, if not superiority, with white men. The body, its physicality and the spaces it occupied, took on new import when black athletes demonstrated on the world stage that physically and athletically they were on par with whites. This demonstration of racial equality through strength and endurance, known as muscular assimilation, for many racial activists “translate[d] to other tasks and responsibilities and thus demonstrate[d] the readiness of African Americans for full participation in the social, economic and political life of the nation.”<sup>24</sup> Joe Louis and Jesse were athletes that the press rallied around in hopes that their demonstrations of ideal black masculinity—self-made, strong, respectful, humble—would lead to racial equality. Similarly, girlfriends, wives, and mothers helped to inform and reimagine black masculinity.

Further, I include black lifestyle magazines published after 1945 in this discussion for several reasons. The black press and its agents assumed the role of civil rights mediator for the entire black community regardless of class (albeit while promoting racial-uplift and espousing middle class ideology), serving as a tool of racial uplift in hopes of advancing racial equality. *Our World* and *Ebony*, black lifestyle magazines created during the Cold War, employed the image of the black veteran as proof of African Americans readiness for full inclusion. Through protest and representation, the black press demonstrated that African Americans were deserving

---

<sup>24</sup> Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins, *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 2004), 270.

of equal rights and access to citizenship. At the core of my dissertation is the question, “How did cultural producers continue to re-imagine the New Negro in order to gain racial equality?” Thus, my project does not assume that a static form of black masculinity was generally received as emblematic of the race, but that African American cultural producers and the black community held malleable assumptions about respectability and masculinity during any given era. I assert that cultural producers made visible representations of ideal black manhood so that ordinary black citizens would model behaviors deemed appropriate and respectable. Furthermore, in their respective publications, these cultural producers created a cultural and political space in which blackness and black masculinity were made distinct yet equal to that of white Americans, thereby asserting African American citizenship.

## Chapter 1: Building the House: Constructing a New Negro

On November 29, 1922, the *New York Amsterdam News* published an editorial, "Quo Vadis."<sup>1</sup> The *News* invited African Americans to ponder, "what will become of the Negro in the United States" within a half century? The editorial instructed readers to not imagine their own existence in fifty years, since most "in the land of the living will be dead," but consider the status of their children and grandchildren. Believing that the current state of the country was one of "disintegration," the editorialist proclaimed that the "government of the people, by the people, and for the people is becoming a bigger joke every day." This, he argued, was due in no small part to a political status quo that allowed the Ku Klux Klan to "exist and . . . inject its poisonous venom in every State in the Union." He underscored that "President Harding sits atop the Capitol in Washington and fiddles away on that old familiar tune that 'all is well,' and assures Gov. John M. Parker of Louisiana that when an emergency exist[s] Federal aid will be given—to save property," but, ostensibly not black bodies.<sup>2</sup>

Acknowledging that even traditional entitlements of citizenship, such as protection by the law, have not protected African Americans from the lynch mob, the editorialist declared that "if during the next fifty years the Negro in America retains and solidifies his racial identity, he will be one of the most important factors in building the new United States." However, if "he follows in the footsteps of the now dominant race, he will be compelled to share that race's fate and go the downward road with it."<sup>3</sup>

"Quo Vadis" seemed to present two options to African Americans regarding the future of the race: embrace a unified New Negro consciousness that was self-directed and demanded

---

<sup>1</sup> Quo Vadis means "where are you going" in Latin.

<sup>2</sup> "Quo Vadis," *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov. 29, 1922, 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Quo Vadis," 6.

recognition in shaping the laws in the United States, or continue to be passive and accommodating to the whims of whites who have failed to embrace African Americans as full citizens. Striking a moderate, yet persuasive tone, “Quo Vadis” informed African Americans that they were responsible for their own fate.

The *Amsterdam News*, like many African American newspapers that existed before and during the early twentieth century, was cautious in tone in expressing the best path for racial progress: protest or accommodation. Chronicling the history of early-twentieth-century black newspapers, William G. Jordan documented that from the onset of the Great War, “black journalists struggled to devise a response to the national emergency that combined the accommodationist impulses of [Booker T.] Washington and the militant style of [William] Trotter.” Jordan marked 1919 as the emergent point for the New Negro within the black press. He argued that the death of Washington in 1915, the end of World War I, the militant style of Trotter’s newspaper, *Fortune*, and “a series of other events and milestones” allowed for a new, more militant, black consciousness to evolve within the black press.<sup>4</sup>

World War I changed black America. After embracing W. E. B. Du Bois’s “Closed Ranks” philosophy, fighting equally, albeit separately, with their white brethren for democracy, African American men returned to the United States only to be welcomed by an upsurge in race riots, the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan, and very little protection under the law. Regardless, of their outward circumstances, black men still held on to their confidence, assertiveness, aggressiveness, and militancy after having fought in the war. Thus, 1919 became a pivotal moment when forces—[Booker T.] Washington’s death, the war, black migration from the West Indies and the South to the North, and the attack on black bodies—culminated to not only help

---

<sup>4</sup> William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America’s War for Democracy, 1914—1920* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 35.

construct a new type of New Negro, but also created spaces for the reimagining of new models of black masculinity that embodied a new race consciousness.

This is not to say that militant and radical presses had not previously existed. As Jordan maintained, accommodationist rhetoric has always had its challengers. Trotter and Du Bois were outspoken opponents of Washington's strategy of accommodationism as a means of solving the problem of the color line. Du Bois believed in liberal education and Trotter advocated agitation and armed self-defense. Hence, black leaders had varying and conflicting ideas on how best for African Americans to gain equal citizenship. Even the black press, more specifically the *Chicago Defender*, had its strategies. The press urged southern males to move North to gain access to jobs and voting rights, which was the litmus test for true citizenship. The rights of black men—that of gaining and protecting—was what was of utmost concern for the black press during the early twentieth century. Newspaper editors and their readers knew the importance of the black press. A, if not *the*, source of communication and connectedness for a diasporic African American people, the black press reported the news but it was also part of the community. As a member and voice of the community, the black press recognized its role in guiding and molding a New Negro consciousness. After the war, whites took notice of the changing attitude of African Americans and blamed the black press—more specifically the northern black presses—for inciting this new perspective.<sup>5</sup> The black press, viewing itself as a civil rights activist, constructed and policed a New Negro consciousness in order to advance racial equality.

Yet, even in 1922, there was some trepidation in expressing a militant black consciousness. “Quo Vadis” did not explicitly call for African Americans to go to the polls or to take up arms, yet, in its subtleties, the editorial implied that there was a unified black

---

<sup>5</sup> Jordan, *Black Newspapers*, 134.



consciousness, a black sensibility, that needed to be harnessed for race's survival. This consciousness would be self-directed in so much as it would not only protect the current state of black bodies, but also construct a future world for the next generation of African Americans. The *Amsterdam News* published a follow-up piece to "Quo Vadis" five weeks later. In "If We Must Follow," the editor informed readers, with a hint of dismay, of why it was necessary to publish a second editorial that would encourage African Americans to embrace a new black consciousness. The readers were reminded of the content of "Quo Vadis," in which the editor

expressed hope that the colored man in America would retain his racial identity and not go the downward road with the Caucasian. We regret that it is necessary to raise such a question. But there are so many among us who believe in the supremacy and infallibility of the Caucasian in America; so many among us who believe that he was created by God to rule the earth; so many among us who believe that we were created to hew wood and draw water.<sup>6</sup>

The *Amsterdam News* printed "If We Must Follow" to "confute such beliefs." Concerned that there was "too much truth in the assertion that" African Americans were "getting more like 'white folks,'" in their "vices and virtues. . . speech and manner . . . belief that [whites] were ordained by God to rule . . . Like them in religion, music, art and literature," the editorialist informed readers that the "white man's civilization is built upon lies and the time is now ripe for us to open our eyes to them."<sup>7</sup> Behaving or "getting more like white folk" was not the consciousness that many uplift agents and New Negro crusaders advocated for when promoting race equality. The *News* viewed this mimicking as a slippery slope that led back to the reedification and reinstitutionalization of white superiority.

---

<sup>6</sup> "If We Must Follow," *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 3, 1923, 10.

<sup>7</sup> "If We Must Follow," 10.

Yet, as the title stated, if blacks must follow and mimic the behaviors and values of whites, then, as the editor wrote, “go all the way.”

If Faith in one’s self and in one’s own kind has helped the white man to succeed, it will help us succeed. The man who believes in God must necessarily believe in himself and in his own kind. We must solidify ourselves in everything that concerns our mutual welfare. We must cast aside those among us who are traitors to our cause and usher in a new day and a new year for the Negro in America.<sup>8</sup>

Sounding reminiscent of Claude McKay’s protest poem, “If We Must Die,” published in the militant *Liberator* in July 1919 in the aftermath of Red Summer, the editorial, “If We Must Follow,” was a postwar call to arms. McKay’s poems informed black men that if we must die, “let us nobly die . . . like men, we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack, pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, if black men must die then they shall die as men, fighting back, in armed or physical resistance and not passively surrendering. “If We Must Follow” also was a call for a black manliness. Not asking black men, outright, to deliver death blows, but, to shed old belief systems.

Editorials such as these reflected the type of conscious-raising strategies black newspapers employed in order to shore up African American men and encourage them to be more self-determined in demanding full citizenship. Likewise, these editorials reflected the persona newspapers were trying to construct for themselves. Editorials printed in the black press presented a race consciousness to their readers. Many of the editorials written in the press—both black and white—did not have bylines, thus the anonymity of the author presented the illusion that the opinions expressed within the editorial were that of the “newspaper,” which served a role as a “member” of the community insofar as it provided a voice and representation, and not that of the individual who wrote it. Furthermore, editorials from other black newspapers were often

---

<sup>8</sup> “If We Must Follow,” 10.

<sup>9</sup> Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” *Claude McKay: Selected Poems* (New York, 1999) 42.

reprinted in varying other black media venues, especially after the establishment of the Associated Negro Press news agency in 1919. The reprint included identifying information such as the newspaper and the city the editorial came from, thus alluding to a diasporic, unified black consciousness or opinion.

### **Constructing a New Negro Leader(ship)**

In 1923, black leadership seemed to be in crisis. With the increase in black migration, lack of jobs, and incidents in lynching, race progress seemed arrested, if not moving in reverse. During that year, Marcus Garvey, the leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), was indicted for mail fraud and publicly berated for allegedly swindling his followers out of large sums of money. Although Garvey was often portrayed in certain black presses as a spectacle and a buffoon, his motto of race first and racial unity struck an appealing, although ambivalent, chord among blacks. At the same time, Du Bois, founding member of the civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the editor of its organ, the *Crisis*, although militant, at times, in his assertions of black equality, championed a more northern racial uplift strategy that left black southerners and the black masses doubly dispossessed. Washington's successor, Robert Russa Moton, found his popularity waning when the press deemed him self-serving and lacking in follow-through and courage. Further, the Church, which had been viewed as a pillar of strength and guidance for blacks since antebellum, still proselytized old-timey methods that no longer resonated well as tools for political resistance and agitation, especially for those blacks who were not willing to wait for their rewards. Thus, key black leaders, especially in the North, were few and far between. And yet, as African Americans and black news editorialists would write, there were also far too many.

Publishers, as well as readers, were seeking a black man that would stand on the national stage and be an effective leader and representative of a new Negro consciousness and black manhood. Exactly who would be the symbol and model for African American progress, and what characteristics this paragon of black masculinity should embody, was unclear. What was clear, by 1923 at least, was that while the press was still trying to build this new house of black manhood and leadership, it was also dismantling previous attributes attached to black masculinity. Articles, editorials, and letters to the editors reflected the tensions regarding who was an ideal leader and how he should behave. Furthermore, these sources also documented the press's role as gatekeeper in determining who could be an ideal black leader.

Eric Derwent Walrond, a Harlem Renaissance writer, wrote in 1923 that “the Negro is at the crossroads of American life. He is, probably more than any other group within our borders, the most vigorously ‘led’”<sup>10</sup> This quote, which was included in the *Amsterdam News* editorial, “We Win Either Way,” expressed the high stakes many felt at the time in regard to black progress and leadership. The editorialist expounded on Walrond's remarks by adding that “we are the most damnably led group in America. . . with all of our leaders, all of our organizations, all of our churches, schools and colleges, our fight for life and liberty grows harder from year to year. So much so that the young Negro has begun to believe that he is held back by this army of leaders.”<sup>11</sup> Voicing the frustration of having so many agents, but still no progress, the editorial suggested that there were too many cooks in the kitchen, and with so many cooks, their varied solutions were counter-productive to solving the race problem. Apparently, this disorder prompted Dr. Kelly Miller, a columnist and “old line leader,” according to the editorialist, to organize a conference that would include all the race leaders and organizations “representing

---

<sup>10</sup> “We Win Either Way,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb. 14, 1923, 11.

<sup>11</sup> “We Win Either Way,” 11.

every phase of Negro life in the country. Right wings, left wings, high brows, [and] low brows. NAACP followers, A. B. B. followers, Friends of Negro Freedom, U.N.I.A. followers, Equal Rights Leaguers, Urban Leaguites.” Also included were leaders from many church denominations, as well as politicians. The *Amsterdam News* offered its “undivided support” and believed that this summit of sorts could not “fail; especially, if each leader goes to the conference armed to the teeth. Then in the event they failed to agree on a constructive race program, they would turn in and kill each other and we would have an opportunity to choose a new set of leaders. WE WIN EITHER WAY!”<sup>12</sup> Aptly sardonic, the *News* comments regarding the materialization of a real and unified solution to the race problem bled through. If no resolution could be attained or common goal met on how to attain black citizenship, the *News* believed that a new black leader should be chosen—one who could not only be a spokesperson and usher in a black modernity, but also be representative and embody the goals, to some extent, of political, religious, legal, and civic organizations.

What probably prompted the *Amsterdam News* editorial and its exasperation toward black leaders was the public feud between Du Bois and Garvey. Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement spoke to a separate but equal co-existence and not racial cooperation, and it appealed to the black masses as opposed to the black elites. It was the solution to the race problem, as well as the performance of black masculinity, that were points of agitation between Garvey and Du Bois. The public animosity between Garvey and DuBois did not go unremarked in the black press in 1923. In January, the *Amsterdam News* published excerpts of an article that Du Bois had written that would appear in the February issue of *Century* magazine, with the title “U. S. Negroes Repudiate ‘Back to Africa,’ Says W. E. B. Du Bois.” In the reprinted highlights from the original

---

<sup>12</sup> “We Win Either Way,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb. 14, 1923, 11.

article, Du Bois, once again, publicly ridiculed and discredited Garvey as a race leader, and aligned him ideologically and strategically with the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>13</sup> According to the reprint, Du Bois denied claims that a vast majority of “American Negroes” had joined the Garvey movement, and marked Garvey as an untrustworthy, self-serving swindler, who, once his Black Star Line failed, “flew South to consult the Grand Cyclops of the Invisible Empire”—the KKK. Du Bois tore apart the belief that Garvey’s strategy of race first was a source of agitation to white supremacy and a viable option for racial equality, stating. “Here is Garvey yelling to life, from the black side, a race consciousness which leaps to meet Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard and other worshippers of the great white race.” To this end, according to Du Bois, the propaganda of race superiority, where “in both lie the seeds of hate and war,” meant “world war and eternal hate and blood . . . and the setting of the world clock back a thousand years.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Amsterdam News*’s decision to reprint only a few excerpts from the original article served *prima facie* as a tool to discredit Garvey and assuage any misperceptions regarding Garvey’s influence and importance as a race leader. In the *Century* article, according to the Garvey’s biographer Colin Grant, Du Bois tried to appear dispassionate when writing about his nemesis. Du Bois, who at one time acknowledged in the *Crisis* that “Garvey was an extraordinary leader of men . . . and capitalized and made vocal the great and long-suffering grievances and spirit of protest among the West Indian peasantry,” in the original *Century* piece, displayed some understanding of Garvey’s followers. He affirmed that Garvey was “not the worst kind of demagogue but, on the contrary, a man who had much which was attractive and understandable in his personality and his program.” However, Du Bois sympathy toward

---

<sup>13</sup> “U. S. Negroes Repudiate ‘Back to Africa,’ Says W. E. B. Du Bois: ‘Crisis’ Editor Declares Marcus Garvey Agitation a Product of Lothrop Stoddard Type of Propoganda—Charges Garvey Negotiated with Ku Klux,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 24, 1923, 7.

<sup>14</sup> “U. S. Negroes Repudiate ‘Back to Africa,’” 7.

Garvey's followers would not be mentioned in the *News* reprint. Thus, what can be surmised by what the *Amsterdam News* chose to reprint is that, along with marginalizing Garvey, the purpose of the reprint was to position Du Bois as a race leader and his followers as modern, progressive race men in contrast with Garvey's followers who were "chiefly from the British Island of Jamaica."<sup>15</sup>

Concerns regarding migration, nativism, and masculinity, as they related to black male representation and leadership, were implicit within the reprint. The *Amsterdam News* stressed that the majority of Garvey's followers were not African Americans and that "Garvey ventures have cost his followers, chiefly from the British Island of Jamaica, close to \$1,000,000," thereby insinuating that African Americans were too discerning and sophisticated to fall for Garvey's tricks, and the fact that they had not was "no ordinary tribute to American Negro poise and common sense and ability to choose and reject leadership." Garvey's leadership, likewise, was also ridiculed. Du Bois offered a backhanded-compliment to the Jamaican's leadership abilities when he addressed the agenda of the Garvey Movement: "If, with a greater and more gifted and efficient Garvey, it sometimes blazes to real flame, it means world war and eternal hate and blood. It means the setting of the world clock back a thousand years."<sup>16</sup> Thus, even if Garvey was an effective leader and able to implement his "Back to Africa" plan, the strategy itself lacked progress for African Americans. African Americans had a choice, the reprint proposed. They could ascribe to Garvey's brand of race consciousness and race supremacy, which, according to the reprint was the inverse of white supremacy. Or, they could choose the path of

---

<sup>15</sup> Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York, 2008), 223, 365-66.

<sup>16</sup> "U. S. Negroes Repudiate 'Back to Africa,'" 7.

Du Bois. Real progress, the piece suggested, was found in race cooperation and association with a more refined, sophisticated leader, Du Bois.<sup>17</sup>

In the February 24, 1923 edition of the *Negro World*, the organ of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Garvey responded to Du Bois's criticism of the organization and his commitment to the race, making clear the organization's crucial role in black progress and in improving the appearance of black manhood within the United States. In "The Dignity of Race—Putting Down the Beggars and Misleaders," Garvey's newspapers stated that since its existence, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association . . . has done more to present the Negro to the world in his true light than all and any of the other movements of the last three hundred years. The world seems to have today a better understanding of the aims and aspirations of the black man than heretofore."<sup>18</sup> The article imparted to readers how Garvey had dismantled some perceived views of black men as

sycophant, a parasite and beggar. . . impression[s] . . . created because of the humiliating attitude adopted by our so-called leaders of the past, who, under the guise of race uplifter, would approach our white friends and neighbors and make them believe that the race was composed of the most dejected, uncouth and unapproachable of mankind; that our condition was such as to create us generally a menace to good breeding, culture and civilization.<sup>19</sup>

Attempting to correct these ills, *Negro World* listed the actual "wants" of a "four hundred million Negroes of the world." The desire "for a free independent Negro government," was in "contrast to what leaders said the Negro wanted," which was "only his food and a place to sleep, only to be a good servant to his master." Denying that black men wanted handouts, Garvey's tenet listed that black men "do not desire what belongs to someone else; we do not desire to interrupt or interfere with the white man's progress and civilization. All that we desire and demand for

---

<sup>17</sup> "U. S. Negroes Repudiate 'Back to Africa,'" 7.

<sup>18</sup> "The Dignity of Race—Putting Down the Beggar and Misleader," *Negro World*, Feb. 24, 1923, 1.

<sup>19</sup> "The Dignity of Race," 1.



ourselves is a place in the world where we can move unfettered and unmolested, wherein we can give to the world a civilization of our own. . . can expand ourselves to become a great people, even as others have done and still are doing for themselves.”<sup>20</sup> Attacking Du Bois more directly, Garvey published a pamphlet in February 1923 as well, called “*Eight ‘Uncle Tom’ Negroes’ The Seven Men and One Woman of the Negro Race Who Wrote the ‘Infamous Letter’ to the Honorable Attorney-General -And- ‘W. S. Burghardt Du Bois As A Hater of Dark People.’*”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Du Bois, from Garvey’s perspective, was a mis-leader.

By mid-February, the public battle and mud-slinging between Garvey and Du Bois caused Floyd J. Calvin, editorialist for the leftist newspaper *The Messenger*, to “impartially review both groups” for the *News* and determine “what should be preserved and what destroyed in each . . . for the best interests of the public at large.”<sup>22</sup> In “The NAACP vs. the U. N. I. A.,” Calvin summarized the goals and the philosophies of each organization. “The names of both denote progress,” according to Calvin, “one wishes to ‘advance,’ the other to ‘improve.’ One has for its objective, building up the historic Motherland, Africa; the other, equality in America.” The success of either program would benefit African Americans, he wrote. Calvin compared the “immediate programs” of both organizations, and, again, concluded that the U. N. I. A’s platform of entrepreneurialship, self-determination, race pride, and the invoking of a race consciousness was just as much “a blessing” as the NAACP immediate goal of civil rights. Again, for Calvin, these seemingly disparate programs both had the same end goal—race progress. Therefore, in Calvin’s opinion, for either group “to forget its primary purpose for existing and devote its entire time to telling the other: ‘Your program is impossible’, is like the pot calling the kettle black,”

---

<sup>20</sup> “The Dignity of Race,” 1.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Volume. 5, (Berkeley, 1986), 257.

<sup>22</sup> Floyd J. Calvin, “The NAACP vs. the U. N. I. A.,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb. 21, 1923, 12.

since neither program would be actualized immediately and each program's core principle—to advance or to improve—suggested a continuous, ongoing struggle.<sup>23</sup>

What was more concerning for Calvin was the public perception that these fights had fostered and how it reflected on African American manhood. Each group, unfortunately, had been reduced to the personalities of their respective leaders. Calvin concluded that “if members of two organizations cannot be about their business carrying out their respective programs—which are basically not programs of destruction—without being disgraced by personal fights between their respective leaders, then both leaders should be repudiated.”<sup>24</sup>

Calvin's editorial examined leadership and masculinity through the leaders' respective memberships. He wrote:

the followers joined with their respective leader to carry out what they believed to be a good program. To be sure they have a right and ought to be loyal in a crisis. But they have no right to give their support until their cause denotes a public nuisance rather than a public service. They have no right to be worked into frenzy until they hate every one who is not of their cult. They have no right to become suspicious of every one who is not as wild and excited as they. It is then that they become victims of personal grievances, rather than followers of constructive leaders.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting that Calvin choose to outline the principles of each organization—hence what was most important and essential was the organization, and less important and replaceable was the leader. Yet, instead of calling those individuals who subscribed to and participated in the organization “members,” he choose to call them “followers.” Hence, each organization was defined by its leader. Thus, the relationship between followers and leaders were mirrored. The leader modeled appropriate masculinity for the followers who then mimicked appropriate behavior. Clearly, the behavior that Du Bois and Garvey demonstrated on the public stage was

---

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, “The NAACP vs. the U. N. I. A.,” 12.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, “The NAACP vs. the U. N. I. A.,” 12.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, “The NAACP vs. the U. N. I. A.,” 12.

not that of progress or modernity, which led Calvin to state that “rather than become demoralized and undermining, it is better to dismiss the leaders before the leaders destroy the unity of the people, for the people can always produce new leaders.”<sup>26</sup>

An editorial that appeared in *Negro World* from the *Daily Negro Times* praised Calvin’s piece that was published in the *Amsterdam News*, and viewed his courage to write or voice his opinion about the U. N. I. A. as “a commendable effort to show that he is very much more than a superficial controversialist about men and measures, and that he has a forward look which requires reflection without prejudice in reaching conclusions.” Indeed, Calvin’s “impartial” assessment of both organizations, and his refusal to not throw the “baby out with the bathwater,” and, possibly, even more so, not to totally repudiate the U. N. I. A. or Garvey, for the *Negro World* editorialist, was a testament to Calvin’s manhood.<sup>27</sup>

What was ironic about the *Negro World*’s commentary on Calvin’s editorial was, that although Calvin attempted to make a balanced assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each organization, the *Negro World*’s editorialist used Calvin’s comments to attack the NAACP and Du Bois, which caused *Negro World* to honor him as a man of reason. The *Negro World* editorialists wrote that “we are disposed to give him and all other men of like mind the credit due them all the more readily because the situation is full of persons who are carried away with their selfish, individual and superficial opinions, which dispose them to be unreasonable and vindictive in their consideration and discussions of men and measures.”<sup>28</sup> Believing that Calvin took a “rational view” in declaring that each leader should not “compromise their membership by

---

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, “The NAACP vs. the U. N. I. A.,” 12.

<sup>27</sup> “N. A. A. C. P. vs. U. N. I. A.,” *Negro World*, March 10, 1923, 9.

<sup>28</sup> “N. A. A. C. P. vs. U. N. I. A.,” 9.

antagonizing each other, the *Negro World* suggested that reason was a masculine quality that followers of the NAACP lacked. The paper argued that Calvin's "rational" editorial

would not be able to convince the selfish and vindictive gentlemen of the Association for the Advancement of Colored People that it is. Nobody invited them and gentlemen of other organizations in race uplift work to neglect their work in order to give most of their time and effort to the work of discrediting the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and nobody of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is going to invite them to discard the policy they have adopted with their eyes open and which they are killing themselves by pursuing, as the blundering petition to the Attorney General conclusively shows. They are so mad they are as blind as Samson's enemies made him, and are determined to destroy themselves in the futile effort to destroy the Universal Negro Improvement Association. What they need to do is to be about their own business and they are learning the truth and force of this fact by the mistakes they have made and are making.

The *Daily Negro Times/News* used Calvin to speak for Garvey. Calvin was a man of logic, he was not selfish, vindictive, or superficial, whereas Du Bois and his followers were constructed as such. And the fact that Calvin did not attack Garvey and went beyond Garvey's superficial representation to examine the benefits of his platform, spoke to his ability for reason and individuality—manly traits that the *Daily Negro Time/News* wanted to elevate.

Unfortunately for Calvin, his exercise of these same qualities came with some repercussions. Placed directly next to the "NAACP vs. U. N. I. A." on the editorial page appeared the *Negro World* feature "Contemporary Comment," and the subheading "Public Policy" penned by Calvin. After he wrote his editorial for the *News* comparing the U. N. I. A. and NAACP, Calvin was dismissed from the *Messenger*. Calvin believed he was fired for distancing himself from the pack by choosing to write an editorial "independently." In "Public Policy," Calvin asserted his own brand of masculinity and surreptitiously positioned himself as a model of leadership. In his opinion piece, Calvin stated he believed that he was fired from the *Messenger* because he did not "point an accusing finger at the entire membership of the

UNIA.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, Calvin suggested he was fired for exercising his own voice and judgment, instead of acquiescing to the dictates of A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owens—who did not have a high appraisal of Garvey. Calvin acknowledged that Randolph and Owen had “the unquestioned right to dictate just what should be expressed in the pages of their magazine,” and were equally “justified in eliminating any factor which tends to create an outside impression that all is not well within their ranks.” Consequently, to be dropped from the *Messenger*’s editorial staff “was both logical and correct,” he admitted. But in his defense, Calvin suggested, that it was a matter of conscience and his role as public servant that made him “willfully invoke such an unavoidable action.”

In “Public Policy,” Calvin positioned himself as a public servant,” who was obligated to “express [his] honest convictions.” Listing the duties of a public servant, Calvin wrote:

First. . . he is either an elected or self-imposed spokesman for the people. Second, in speaking or acting for the people, what rule must be his guide? In order to remain a servant—helpful, constructive, prophetic—he must seek to advance the people’s interests. Third, how can those interests be best advanced? By lessening friction between groups, by calmly pointing out errors for the people to avoid, by presenting a practical program from which the majority may derive specific benefit.

Calvin thus concluded that as a public servant, he “could not advocate that the U. N. I. A. be smashed simply because Marcus Garvey is suspected of being a bad actor.” The duties and character traits of a public servant—helpful, constructive, calm, practical—were similar to that of a leader. Discursively positioning himself as a leader and a self-possessed black man, Calvin called upon African American men to recognize and surveil these qualities in their leader. Further, by calling Garvey a “bad actor,” Calvin conveyed the difference between the public

---

<sup>29</sup> Floyd J. Calvin, “Contemporary Comment: Public Policy,” *Negro World*, March 10, 1923, 9.

performance of respectable black leadership and masculinity versus the tenets and actions of an effective black male leader.<sup>30</sup>

When constructing, appraising, and policing black male leadership, the press was preoccupied with the public re/presentation of a respectable and modern black representative—one who: embodied a new race consciousness; demonstrated courage, vigor, and conviction; worked on behalf of the race; and, ultimately, produced results. Not surprisingly, in April 1923, the *Pittsburgh Courier* became a bit nostalgic for a former leader, Booker T. Washington. In appreciation of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute's Founders Day, the *Courier* printed an editorial with an accompanying illustration. In "The Spirit of Booker T," the editorialist wrote that "the celebration of Founders Day at Tuskegee ought to become habitual with the institute and with Negroes generally. But there is something greater than the institute which should be kept alive forever. It is the spirit of Booker T. Washington, a living, throbbing thing; present and abiding in the life of the American Negro."<sup>31</sup> Creating a myth out of the man, the editorialist furthered that "it was the expression of that great soul that rose in brick and stone to do a new and a great work for a forgotten people." Reiterating that it was Washington that was to be worshipped and honored on Founder's Day, the piece offered that

there is little significance to be attached to any personality connected with the institution. Men travel far to be present at Founders Day, not to be present at Tuskegee. Founders Day means to touch again the great spirit that gave birth to the idea. It is the idea that men worship, and the founder is remembered for his idea. If Tuskegee should be wiped off the earth, there would still abide the father of the idea; and the longer Booker T. Washington is dead, the higher will rise the voices of men and women who believe in an idea properly expressed.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, "Contemporary Comment" 9.

<sup>31</sup> "The Spirit of Booker T." *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 14, 1923, 16.

<sup>32</sup> "The Spirit of Booker T," 16.

Washington, from the editorialist's perspective, had produced results and benefited the race. Although many opposed his strategies for race progress, his ideas allowed for some tangible results which included the Tuskegee Normal School. The illustration that appeared with the editorial featured a drawing of a white arm extended in handshake to a black arm. On the sleeve of the white arm it reads "white educator," and the black arm reads "Negro educator." A drawing of Washington was in the middle, acting as a bridge. The caption reads: "What Booker Washington would have rejoiced to see: education by conference and cooperation rather than by dictation."<sup>33</sup>

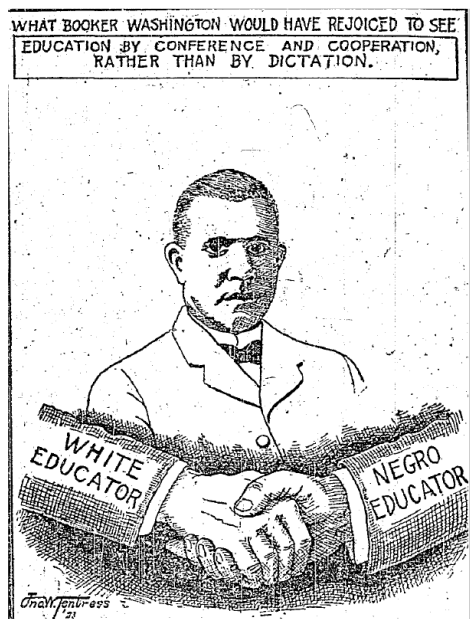


Figure 1: "Spirit of Booker T," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 14, 1923.

Major Robert Moton, Washington's successor at Tuskegee, came under fire in 1923 after the new two-million-dollar veterans' hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama, was staffed with only white physicians, although the assumption was that black physicians would also be hired. In "Which Way, Major Moton?" the *Amsterdam News* editors expressed their outrage with Moton for not

---

<sup>33</sup> "The Spirit of Booker T," 16.

ensuring that African Americans were employed. As a race leader, Moton was expected to advocate for the best interest of the race first. Because it appeared that this was not happening, the editorialist questioned Moton's loyalty. The editorial began:

We are beginning to wonder how, where and when Major Robert R. Moton won his rank—fighting on the side of the white man, the black man or for neither. Each time he has been weighed in the balance of public opinion, he has been found wanting in everything except physical weight. He seems to be lacking in the necessary courage to face issues of vital concern to the Negro today.<sup>34</sup>

Blending in personal swipes, the *News* was clearly upset with Moton's inability to advocate for blacks. The questioning of Moton's allegiance was at the heart of the editorial. Comparing Moton to his predecessor, the *News* wrote that "whatever may have been wrong with the philosophy of Dr. Booker T. Washington, he at least had the courage of his convictions. He left no doubt in the public mind as to where he stood on public matters pertaining to his race."

Acknowledging that many of Washington's principles left blacks wanting, the *Amsterdam News* suggested, at least one could rationalize that he was a race man because he advocated and secured results for African Americans. Although Moton seemed to have the basic qualifications of a race leader and modeled black respectability and presented decent oratory skills, the *News* admitted this was not enough. Moton, according to the newspaper, lacked the vision of black progress. Furthermore, Moton was "out of step and out of place. He may be a good drillmaster in a camp or on a school campus. He may look good and courageous in a uniform but he is not the man to be at the head of a large institution of learning like Tuskegee Institute." The editorial called for Moton's removal, arguing that "the sooner he is removed from office the better. We believe that the principal of a school should have some of the attributes of leadership and that courage is one of the principal ones." Symbolically and superficially, Moton was a race leader,

---

<sup>34</sup> "Which Way, Major Moton?" *New York Amsterdam News*, June 13, 1923, 12.



but he lacked the courage, conviction, and modern black consciousness to fight for blacks. Further, the issue was not that he did not advocate for blacks, but that he did not speak aggressively and assertively for African Americans.<sup>35</sup>

In this editorial, the *Amsterdam News* referenced another editorial that defended Moton's inactions with the Tuskegee debacle, which asserted that "Major Moton 'is not responsible for the mix-up and mess-up' at the hospital and that the responsibility rests with the Washington Administration." The editorial from the *Atlanta Independent* added that Moton was "powerless to open, close or select the personnel for services in the hospital." If this was true, declared the *Amsterdam News*, then "why. . . does he not speak out in clear and unmistakable tones on the subject and place the responsibility where it belongs?" the *News* surmised that the reason Moton was not being forthright was "some of the trustees of Tuskegee [had] whispered in Dr. Moton's ear demanding that he submit to the wishes of the Governor of Alabama and recede from his supposed position in the matter of personnel."<sup>36</sup> The editorial concluded with an announcement that Moton was scheduled for an upcoming public appearance at Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, stating that "we do not know what he will talk about, but we do know what he ought to talk about if he has the interest of his race at heart, if he is half the man he ought to be and if he has any regard for his future standing in the race he professes to love."<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately, Moton did not behave the way the *Amsterdam News* editors mandated he should. The headline for the issue that reported on his visit to New York read, "Dr. Moton Infers Negro Physicians Are Incompetent: Refuses to Make Clean Breast of Situation At Veterans' Hospital At Tuskegee." Already upset with Moton and his leadership style, the *News* continued

---

<sup>35</sup> "Which Way, Major Moton?" 12.

<sup>36</sup> "Which Way, Major Moton?" 12.

<sup>37</sup> "Which Way, Major Moton?" 12.

to marginalize him, question his manhood, and put him and black America at odds. The *Amsterdam News* quoted Moton's opening remarks: "If the thing you hear so much recently about, people would only keep quiet about it and get ready, all would be well." The *News*, embodying the race leader it wished Moton to be, brandished courage and claimed voice by pressing Moton for answers. Personifying itself and not listing any author, the article stated that "when asked by a representative of the *Amsterdam News* for a further expression of the matter he repeated the same cryptic utterance. Pressed for further statement, he added: 'If the physician would only get ready, all would be well. I don't care to say any more now, but will give out a public statement in a few days.'" Moton's reference to black physicians clearly did not state he believed them incompetent. However, the *News*, by taking journalistic liberty with Moton's statement and inferring "get ready" to mean "incompetent," set up a debate in which Moton would be forced to defend his leadership abilities.<sup>38</sup>

Whereas the *Amsterdam News* questioned aspects of Moton's courage and ability to be a race leader based on his inability to "speak" on behalf of African Americans, Moton, during his appearance at Abyssinian Baptist Church, performatively challenged those attacks against his manhood. During his speech, Moton stated, "Sometimes when I speak in the South my wife say I speak too frankly—you say everything you think. I have found that to be the best method to talk to black people and white people alike and so far I haven't been lynched."<sup>39</sup> Moton, by stating that he was candid with both blacks and whites, suggested that he did not censure his voice, that he did not fear repercussions for asserting his manhood. Moton provided examples of when he stood up for blacks even when the consequence meant bodily harm:

---

<sup>38</sup> "Which Way, Major Moton?" 12.

<sup>39</sup> "Dr. Moton Infers Negro Physicians Are Incompetent: Refuses to Make Clean Breast of Situation at Veterans' Hospital at Tuskegee," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 20, 1923, 1.

Some time ago a noted editor in the course of his address to a colored audience said: "You niggers must learn to stay in your place." This man had been making a hit with the audience, but no sooner had he said this than he lost out with them. Colored people are the greatest at freezing you out if they don't like what you say without saying a word—they'll make you think you're in a cold storage. Later I got up and told the editor that he was wrong. I also said that any one who told Negroes that they could not have social equality was a fool.<sup>40</sup>

Simultaneously ingratiating his audience and positioning himself as an authority on black values and behavior, Moton discursively staked claim to why he was a race leader.

Continuing his story, Moton claimed that after having made that statement and chastising the presumably white editor, he was advised to leave town. In response to the subtle threat, Moton alleged that he "stood just where I was, and the next day the speaker wrote an editorial in the Memphis Commercial-Appeal saying that it was a mistake to use any other term than 'Negro.'" In his speech, Moton tried to convince his audience of his manliness. He articulated and demonstrated courage, in the face of bodily harm, in order to advocate for African Americans, and informed them that "If standing up for my people is a crime, I am ready to die for it."<sup>41</sup> Lastly, Moton provided evidence that he was a progressive leader and should not be associated with the leadership styles of complacent or accommodationist leader who believed that "the Negro must stay in his place." Moton stated that he advocated for "supremacy of character and not one of color."<sup>42</sup>

In the following weeks after the hospital controversy and his Abyssinian speech, the *Amsterdam News's* reportage on Moton was not as critical and instead, seemed to give him the benefit of the doubt regarding his authority in staffing the hospital. On June 27, the headline read, "Negro Staff for Hospital About Ready: Major Robert R. Moton Gives Assurance in

---

<sup>40</sup> "Dr. Moton Infers," 1.

<sup>41</sup> "Dr. Moton Infers," 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Dr. Moton Infers," 3.

Address That He has Not Receded From His Position.” The article stated that “Dr. Moton and others in position know the facts that he had not receded from his demands for an entire colored personnel. His position was strengthened by the announcement the preceding day by Director Hines of the U. S. Veterans Bureau of Washington, D. C. that a colored staff for the hospital had been almost complete.”<sup>43</sup> Armed with more knowledge, the *News* seemed to try to redeem Moton by empathizing with the obstacles he faced as a black man. In the editorial, “The Fog Is Lifting,” the editorialist wrote that

because we are in New York and not in Alabama does not mean that we cannot sympathize with or appreciate what Major Robert R. Moton has been up against in his advocacy of colored personnel for the United States Veterans’ Hospital at Tuskegee. The vast majority of colored people living here in this section of the country are from the South, and thousands of others have at some time sojourned in the South and have seen the Southern white man in action.<sup>44</sup>

Although expectations of masculinity were demonstrated differently, issues of racism and denial of citizenship had no boundaries, the editorialist suggested. The one commonality that black men shared was the knowledge that the South did not allow for the full expression of black manhood. This fog—that Moton’s actions were being thwarted by bureaucratic means—was some consolation in redeeming Moton as a race leader. Still, the editorialist argued, that Moton “played an honorable part” in the press’s antagonism toward him by not being forthright and vocal about the obstacles he faced.<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, by July, the *Amsterdam News* was again at odds with Moton, and in their editorial wanted his resignation as head of Tuskegee. In “Moton Should Resign,” the *News* seemed shocked at a recent “statement published in a daily newspaper” that Moton had

---

<sup>43</sup> “Negro Staff for Hospital About Ready: Major Robert R. Moton Gives Assurance in Address That He Has Not Receded From His Position,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 27, 1923, 1.

<sup>44</sup> “The Fog Is Lifting,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 27, 1923, 12.

<sup>45</sup> “The Fog Is Lifting,” 12.

“‘consistently stood for a white personnel in command’ at the War Veterans’ Hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama.”<sup>46</sup> According to a statement reprinted in the *Amsterdam News* from the *New York World*, “the leading citizens of Tuskegee stated that they never would have allowed the hospital to be built in their neighborhood if the Government had not provided for control by white men. They say they will not allow the hospital to open with Negroes in charge.”<sup>47</sup> The *News*, unclear as to whether Moton had knowledge of this information beforehand, could not vouch for Moton’s character based on his prior inconsistencies as a race leader. Believing that the “ex-drillmaster has not stood consistently either for whites or Negroes. . . [and that] he has muddled the situation to such an extent that it is difficult to tell heads or tails about it. . . all because he did not make his position known.” Based on all the ambiguity, the *News* concluded that “Robert R. Moton ought to resign from his position as principal of Tuskegee. His unknown stand in regard to the hospital is now beside the question. His usefulness to Tuskegee and the race is at an end. No man who will permit himself to be so continuously misunderstood on public matters is fit to teach the youth of the race.”<sup>48</sup> Moton’s “usefulness” as a leader and of black progress had become old and neither progressive nor effective. It was not so much that he could not guarantee the jobs or his supposed lack of advocacy, it was, according to the *News*, that he was not a man of conviction nor a man of his word, and his credibility was tarnished.

As July progressed, the waters became less muddied and it appeared that Moton and President Harding had intended to have the Veterans’ Hospital staffed by black personnel. But, by this time, the damage was done—Moton seemed to have lost all credibility, and editorially, the *Amsterdam News* and the *Afro-American* began to distance themselves from the Tuskegee

---

<sup>46</sup> “Moton Should Resign,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 11, 1923, 12.

<sup>47</sup> “Negro Doctors For Negro Patients,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 11, 1923, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> “Moton Should Resign,” 12.

principal. In July, news reports surfaced that Moton had been threatened by the Ku Klux Klan for wanting to hire black personnel for the veterans' hospital. Unfortunately, the black press had lost faith in Moton and was not at all sympathetic when this news surfaced. In response, NAACP sent a letter to President Harding requesting federal troops be sent to Tuskegee to protect Moton. Prior to this, the press would have rallied behind or, at the very least, been sympathetic toward a black man, especially a race leader, who had been threatened for exercising their manhood; instead, the *Baltimore Afro-American* viewed the incident as humorous and ironic.

The *Afro-American* alluded that the threat was somewhat poetic justice as a consequence for Moton's style of leadership. Calling Moton the "Prince of Hat Passers," the *Afro-American* reminded readers of when Moton "went to France soon after the war to show Negro troops wherein the proper thing to do was to 'keep quiet,'" but yet "squawked his head off getting the Government Hospital located in Tuskegee now can't come out of his house because of the white sheet men. . . Robert suffers without any sympathy."<sup>49</sup> Similar to the *Amsterdam News*, the *Afro-American* viewed Moton's leadership and his performance of black masculinity as archaic and self-serving. By labeling him the "Prince of Hat Passers," the *Afro-American* constructed Moton as a person who sought handouts, and the question of "voice" was reiterated here as well. While Moton allegedly told black veterans not to voice their own injustices, thus denying them the opportunity to exercise their freedoms, Moton "squawked," or made a spectacle to get credit for the veterans' hospital in Tuskegee in order to secure his own legacy. The irony, of course, was that such "squawking" put him on the Klan's radar. The irony was further extended because, as the editorial pointed out, "The Ku Klux Klan, the once hundred per centers, who believe in white

---

<sup>49</sup> "Moton, Harding, and the K. K. K.," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 13, 1923, 10.

supremacy are now embarrassed by fighting for the right to have white gentlemen and white ladies to administer to the needs and wants of colored men.”<sup>50</sup>

In June 1923, the *Amsterdam News* reprinted an editorial from the *Pittsburgh Courier* titled, “Thin-Skinned Leaders,” in which the editorialist criticized black leaders for being too sensitive and self-serving. It was the “thin-skinned leader [who] was the most despicable” type of black leader, according to the piece, because he “exalts himself to the position of dictator, but . . . regards constructive criticism of his acts as abuse and slander.” This type of black man was unfit to lead, the editorial suggested because he “is too thin of skin. . . easily offended. . . [and,] can not stand before the guns of criticism.”<sup>51</sup>

Per the editorial, the current school of black leaders were upbraided for being self-serving—“band[ing] together for own welfare, advertisement and self-promotion. They are clannish to a fault and selfish beyond endurance. . . cash in on all the efforts of other Negroes. They appropriate the thoughts and deeds of the thinking and doing men and women. . .and with a loud declaration proclaim themselves the father of all thought and action.” Without naming specific individuals, “Thin-Skinned” dually alerted readers about and policed the untoward behaviors of black leaders. They argued that African Americans needed to be skeptical of and question the leadership abilities of black representatives who were boastful, lacked originality and motivation, and would sell-out his community. Such a man did not possess the qualities or the character of an ideal masculine leader.

Although the current crop of black men seemed to lack the character, consciousness, and deportment, the editorialist found appealing and necessary in a black leader, all was not lost. According to the piece:

---

<sup>50</sup> “Moton, Harding, and the K. K. K.,” 10.

<sup>51</sup> “Thin-Skinned Leaders,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 13, 1923, 12.

there is coming up in this country a type of Negro who will not compromise with truth, nor will he suffer himself to be led by the incompetents. It is most encouraging to note that our Negro journals of thought, originality, of courage and conviction are for the most part edited by the rising army of new thinkers and actual performers. The Negro press today has more vigor, more life and common sense than it has ever had before, and its force for improvement and race betterment is being felt with appreciation the country over. Let us develop men who are willing to lead, even under the fire; men whose skins will not break under criticism; men who will respect the judgment and opinions of others—and even of the common people, if you please. The man who can not stand criticism and the severest kind, had better retire from the ranks of leadership.<sup>52</sup>

“Thin-Skinned Leaders” positioned black journalists and the black press as the leaders of the black community. Attributing itself with human and manly qualities—such as thought, courage, conviction, vigor, and life—the black press viewed itself as the entity that would lead and speak for the black public. According to the piece, this new black press possessed the leadership qualities, attitude, and aptitude that had already resulted in race betterment. Thus, based on its proven record, it would be the black press that would cultivate and mentor black men into leaders.

Readers took note of the rhetoric and tone of the black press and the more modern black consciousness being editorialized within its pages. Arthur E. King wrote a letter, “To the Editor of Amsterdam News,” addressed to “Sir,” to express his “sincere appreciation” for the “splendid progress” made by the newspaper under the guidance of its current editor. Although King did not acknowledge William M. Kelley as the editor, a post Kelley assumed in 1922, King believed that it was Kelley who brought “a manly, intelligent, and independent viewpoint” to the newspaper and felt assured that the “public [would] show its appreciation by giving [Kelley] the support such laudable work merits.” King especially wanted to praise the *Amsterdam News* editor for the two editorials, “We Win Either Way” and “Stool Pigeon Letter,” that chastised black leadership.

---

<sup>52</sup> “Thin-Skinned Leaders,” 12.



King, crediting Kelley with penning the editorials that appeared in the *Amsterdam News*, wrote, “you are getting into your stride. Do not forget that there is in New York an intelligent Negro public that will read Negro papers that are properly edited, and that their interests are worldwide.” Possibly alluding to the probability that the *Amsterdam News* could lose some readership because of its vocal denouncement of accommodationist leaders, King reminded Kelley that there was an “intelligent” class of African Americans that did not subscribe to compromise as a political tool, and, in fact, was quite progressive and varied in its views and interests. This African American public, according to King, would support the *Amsterdam News* as long as it remained in good quality and demonstrated “editorial intelligence and vigor” above “circulation, which in turn precedes advertising.”<sup>53</sup>

King was concerned that the *Amsterdam News* would sacrifice quality, intelligence, and courage for profit. As a tool that embodied masculine characteristics, King was aware that not all black newspapers embraced *that* type of modernity, despite being located in urban areas. King wrote that “Negro journalism in New York [was] still on a rather low plane—partisan, backward and catering mostly to people who have apparently lost their ideals or are without any. Negative factors are rehashed to the point of boredom; positive things are for the most part ignored or treated without comprehension.” King posited that “if in the center of white civilization and in the most populous Negro city in the world we cannot produce journals worthy of the name, then we must admit we lack capacity for development in a favorable millennium.” King believed that in a modern, progressive city, such as New York, blacks should have a press that articulated and reflected a modern black consciousness and worldview. Similar to leaders, the black press

---

<sup>53</sup> Arthur E. King, Letters to the Editor, “Expresses Appreciation,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb. 21, 1923, 12.

needed to not only represent, but also embody the characteristics of the New Negro—courage, intelligence, and principles.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Black Press: Modeling, Constructing, and Policing A New Negro Consciousness**

In 1924, the *Chicago Defender* reprinted an article by George W. Gore, Jr. in their editorial section that promoted the importance of the black press and its role as a member of the black community. In “Author Forecasts Future of Our Press—Aims and Needs,” Gore wrote that

the Negro press reflects the growing race consciousness of 12,000,000 American citizens of African descent. The status of the Negro newspaper is fixed—it is here to stay. The appeal of the Negro newspaper is direct and racial. In a manner similar to that of the rural press, the Negro paper has an unlimited field because of its personal relationship to its readers.<sup>55</sup>

Gore spoke of the black press as a provincial mechanism of the black community. The black press, Gore affirmed, knew the pressing issues and values of the black community because of its personal relationship with and within the black community. As spokesperson for the black community, the black press reflected and mediated a race consciousness and racial perspective of African Americans. Thus, the black press was a black leader, speaking to and for the black community, and modeling, mirroring, and proclaiming race sensibilities and citizenship.

The article touted the importance of the black press—its future as a source of reputable employment—and encouraged more progressive-minded African Americans to consider working in the field. Gore wrote that “no longer must the Negro journalist necessarily be an unpaid worker. Trained journalists can obtain respectable salaries and find as many openings as their fellow workers on metropolitan dailies and national weeklies and monthlies.” Gore declared that

---

<sup>54</sup> King, “Expresses Appreciation,” 12.

<sup>55</sup> George W. Gore Jr., “Author Forecasts Future of Our Press—Aims and Needs,” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 20, 1924, sec. 2, 5.

the quality of the black press was changing because black colleges were now offering journalism courses. Consequently, black newspapers were being staffed by black men and women journalist who had some training and brought “with them burning enthusiasm and high professional ideals.” Plus, as the article insinuated, there would be a demand for jobs. Gore predicted that “Negro semi-weeklies and eventually dailies in the larger cities will undoubtedly be developed within the next decade. The size of many of the present weeklies will be increased of necessity. Better news stories and more real news will be the result.”<sup>56</sup> More immediately, he indicated, was the demand for black journalists in the South. Acknowledging that although a swell of blacks continued to migrate North, a majority of blacks remained in the South, and “Negro journalism needs and will continue to need its best trained editors and managers. There it will need men of sound judgment and common sense; men of purpose and high professional ideals; men of broad sympathy and great patience.” Thus, Gore was suggesting that the South needed journalists who embodied a new Negro consciousness to help change the existing sensibilities of black southerners. This new generation of black journalists would need to possess not only credentials and modern, and presumed, northern sensibilities, but also needed to evince sympathy and patience toward black southerners, who supposedly had not yet demonstrated self-determinism. With the increase in black literacy, Gore suggested that the “race was to benefit” from these progressive “twentieth century Negro youths” who would carry the race with them.<sup>57</sup>

Speaking through Gore, the *Defender* self-promoted the importance of the black press. Debunking the belief that the black journalism was not as informed or of as good quality as white dailies, and that black journalists were not as credible or credentialed as their white

---

<sup>56</sup> George W. Gore Jr., “Author Forecasts Future of Our Press—Aims and Needs,” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 20, 1924, sec. 2, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Gore, “Author Forecasts Future of Our Press,” 5.

counterparts, Gore attempted to alter readers' perceptions regarding the black press. As the caliber of the black press and its staff was changing from the old to the new, so, too, was the consciousness and style it was putting forth. With an evolving race consciousness and perceptions regarding what it meant to be a black man, it was not surprising that Gore and the black press believed that the greatest need for black journalists and "the best trained editors and managers" was in the South. The black press believed it was its job to help emulate and mold a new Negro consciousness found in, presumably, northern metropolises. The *Defender* positioned Gore as an authority on the press—providing him a byline and listing him as "Author of Negro Journalism."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Gore viewed himself as a New Negro, embodying a new black consciousness, and ready to lead the black masses.

As 1927 came to a close, the *Defender* published on its front page the New Year's resolutions for the race. According to the article, the strategy that every African American should adopt in 1928 was to not think of himself or herself as an African American but as a United States citizen. In "'Blot Out Color Line'—1928 Fight: Draft Plans for Crusade on Injustice," readers were informed that the most prominent and influential of civic, political, and church leaders endorsed that from 1928 forward, there "is to be no more 'I am a Colored Man'." The *Defender*, obviously leery of printing yet another proclamation by race leaders and organizations, began the salvo by admitting that "each year there are resolutions on top of resolutions stacked up by organizations and individuals as to what course they will follow during the coming year. Most of them are just another resolution." This resolution, apparently, was different because it was "adopted by the most influential bodies in the country that is an exception to the rule."<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Yet, what the *Defender* neglected to mention was that Gore was a journalism student at DePauw University, and his pamphlet, *Negro Journalism: An Essay on the History and Present Conditions of Our Press*, was written in 1922 to fulfill a course requirement.

<sup>59</sup> "'Blot out Color Line'—1928 Fight: Draft Plan for Crusade on Injustice," *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 31, 1927, 1.

According to the declaration, black men and women were to no longer think of themselves as “colored” because there was too much negative association attached to being a Colored man. Thus, by no longer identifying as Colored, black men would have the “realization at last he has become emancipated, in thought he has the right to enjoy the privileges of freedom as set down by Abraham Lincoln . . . as though one person this group has awakened to the fact that the ‘color line’ in America is just as absurd as to think of and run from a black cat advancing in front of one’s path.” Suggesting that what inhibited racial progress for African Americans was the belief that they were not “free” psychologically, leaders, including church leaders, vowed to persuade their followers and “flock” “to demand what they want.” The article informed readers that this new perspective was not a call for violence or arrogance, and that “it is not expected to see men going around with clubs in their hands or chips on their shoulders, for that would be going back to barbaric stages as exist in the South.” This New Year’s resolution was to usher in a New Negro who would have a “far greater weapon—an emancipation of the mind that there is no color line.”<sup>60</sup>

In the same issue the *Defender* printed its response to the New Year’s resolution, “The Color Line Must Go!” The editorial, as compared to the article “Blot Out the Color Line,” did not view the color line as an illusionary obstacle that hampered African American men from viewing themselves as equal to whites. Instead, “Must Go” positioned black men as peers with white men, in theory, but acknowledged that the real effects of the color line presented “the greatest hindrance to our progress and advancement. It greets us in business—stares us in the face in social and civic life—interferes with our progress in our intercourse with our fellow men

---

<sup>60</sup> “‘Blot out Color Line’,” 1; see also, “Drop Title ‘Negroes’; To Be Known as Americans: Drop ‘Negro’ Is New Move for Freedom,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 7, 1928, 1; and “Demand Public Places Blot Out Color Line: Want Public Places Open to All Races; Citizenship Crusade Hits Color Line,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 14, 1928, 1.

in America. It must go.”<sup>61</sup> Likewise, in tone and action, “Must Go” was qualitatively different than “Blot Out.” Whereas “Blot Out” was moderate in its address and tried to persuade African Americans to realize the psychological impact of race by asking them to undergo more of an intellectual exercise in eradicating segregation, “Must Go” tried to elicit an emotional response that would not only evoke a new race consciousness, but also a call for more direct action.

The editorial began by reminding readers of the old strategies used to secure equal citizenship. Pointing out that black men have “demonstrated” and “proved” their masculinity and citizenship over the years, and even “pleaded in vain” to “those in America who are opposed, not only to our progress, but who are fanatics to the extent that they will willingly injure their country if they can hurt us,” the piece established that even with adhering to the tenets of manhood, African American men were still not treated as citizens. Even passive, perceived-unmanly actions, did not produce any desired results. The editorialist exposed the exhaustive and degrading measures black men undertook to appeal to the benevolence of others and reminded readers how “we have waited patiently, asking but to be relieved of this humiliation when Americans came to the realization that they have been unjust to us—we have waited in vain. We have asked, begged, cajoled and temporized—the results have been infinitesimal.” In fact, these old strategies, outmoded and demeaning, have resulted in being “deserted. . . and left...to our own devices. . . . [by] those who once were ardent friends [,] while those who have been against us have steadily fortified their position.” Recognizing that race progress had become worse rather than better, especially in the North with “the sorry spectacle of restaurants and hotels slamming doors in our faces” and “foreigners and southerners in jobs we once held and dictating the policies of the institutions that were once inclined to accord us the places we have already

---

<sup>61</sup> “The Color Line Must Go!,” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 31, 1927, A2.

earned for ourselves,” the editorial made plain the underbelly of not being self-reliant and issued a call for black men to take action.<sup>62</sup>

“1928,” according to the editorial, was to be the “banner year.” In this new year “no longer [could] men claiming they are men accept the situation we have been forced to accept for the past 50 years.” Provoking black men to be active in fighting for their citizenship rights, the piece asserted that 1928 would be the year that “we give notice that we are marshaling our forces to fight to the finish color lines and the discriminations and humiliations that follow them. We are demanding that we be accepted upon our merit and worth, and that we be rejected upon our lack of merit, and that alone!” In shaping a new Negro consciousness, the *Defender* wanted black men to embrace the reality that they were already Americans and, thus, no longer believe they needed to prove their worth and value as citizens. The new Negro would seize upon the knowledge that “America is not a white man’s country—it is a nation of all races, and all races must share in its joys and its sorrows. All races under the sun have contributed to the nation that is America, and by that same token all races are entitled to a share in its progress and profit.”<sup>63</sup>

As already existing citizens bestowed with rights and entitlements, the *Defender* encouraged African Americans to exercise that one privilege to which they should have unmitigated access—the law. Reminding readers that “there are laws on our statute books to cover every situation of which we now complain,” the *Defender* implored African Americans to demand that these laws be enforced and be active in the protection of black bodies and the erasure of black marginalization. Further, the editorial encouraged African Americans to be proactive in being members of a democratic body, insisting that “where we find that laws are needed, we must see that they are provided.” Thus, the *Defender*, cognizant of the economic and

---

<sup>62</sup> “The Color Line Must Go!,” A2.

<sup>63</sup> “The Color Line Must Go!,” A2.

social limitations black men endured, insisted that they utilize the one privilege they had access to—the vote. A few weeks earlier, the *Pittsburgh Courier* similarly encouraged African American to “recognize” and utilize their political power. In “Recognizing Our Political Power,” the *Courier* demonstrated how the “Aframerican” vote affected the outcome of elections in major cities such as Cleveland, Louisville, Memphis, and New York. The editorials declared that the new Negro was one who voted with “intelligence” and “out of self-interest,” instead of “blindly out of sentiment.” As if guided by this new race consciousness, the editorial maintained that African Americans recognized “the necessity of ignoring political parties and their empty appeals and voting for the organization that definitely offer[ed] something more than kind words” and, as 1927 seemed to have demonstrated, the need to “punish local political organizations that ignore the Negro when they get into power.” Blacks were “marching onward and upward” in the fields of business, education, art, and politics, the *Courier* declared, and “with this increased assurance born of accomplishment and knowledge of his powers and abilities the New Negro is successfully orienting himself to his changing environment.” The next goal for the New Negro, according to the *Courier*, was to elect a black congressman and increase “active participation in the Democratic primary in every Southern state, and greater development and organization of his economic power.”<sup>64</sup>

In both the *Courier*’s and the *Defender*’s editorials, the New Negro was mapped as intelligent, self-directed, and willing and able to harness the power of the vote. These editorials suggested that the New Negro must not just embrace a new race consciousness, but also utilize the privilege of citizenship. The time was now, the *Defender* insisted, for “we now have every means at our hands to break down the things that hurt us most—why should we wait further?”

---

<sup>64</sup> “The Color Line Must Go!,” A2; “Recognizing Our Political Power,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec. 3, 1927, 20.



The removal of the color line, or racial discrimination and separation, was more than just an emancipation of the mind, the *Defender* editorial argued. The committee of black leaders—or Citizenship Crusade, as it was later called—urged African Americans to recognize the fallacy of racial inferiority and occupy places they normally would not patronize for fear of being humiliated and embarrassed. The *Defender* asked African Americans to perform these symbolic performances of citizenship—asserting the rights already given to them—in places where the outcomes would benefit blacks and potentially disempower white Americans, and thus voicing a more radical, militant tone and directive not presented by the “Blot Out” committee. The *Defender* presented itself not only as a member of the community, but stated it spoke “for our Race, the race that until today, has been denied a spokesman!” Indeed, the *Defender* viewed itself as a race leader.<sup>65</sup>

For the remainder of January 1928, the *Defender* continued to publish expanded resolutions made by black leaders and endorsed their new creed “America first and America only” in editorials that proposed blacks view themselves as an “Americans” as a strategy for acquiring equal citizenship.<sup>66</sup> “We Are Americans” located African American citizenship status, firstly, in the Fourteenth Amendment and in their contributions to building the United States. The *Defender* declared

We are Americans in every sense of the word. For hundreds of years we have worked to make America what she is today. We have worked involuntarily and voluntarily, and the sum of all our labors is seen in the progress of this nation. Why, then, should we go about labeling ourselves as Negroes or Afro-Americans or Colored or any of the other numerous tags applied to us? Does not our complexion speak eloquently enough for itself? Is it necessary that this incidental skin pigmentation be made the paramount issue where our worth to the nation is concerned?<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> “The Color Line Must Go!,” A2.

<sup>66</sup> “Drop Title ‘Negroes’; To Be Known As Americans,” 1.

<sup>67</sup> “We Are Americans,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 7, 1928, A2.

The editorial positioned black labor as the determining marker and qualifier for citizenship, and legitimized the “unpaid” labor of slavery as work. Skin complexion or race was irrelevant since it was apparent that African Americans were “not white, as white is recognized....and for that matter it is known that whites . . . [were] not blacks.” Subsequently, the editorial questioned “where is the necessity for proclaiming to the world that we are Negroes . . . [since] as Americans we are entitled to everything to which every other American is entitled.” Racial descriptors, then, were just another “system of segregation” that allowed for and perpetuated the myth that African Americans had not contributed to the growth of the nation and thus were not worthy of citizenship, this editorial suggested. The *Defender* proclaimed, again, that they “expect[ed] great things” in 1928: “We expect to remove the color line, to wipe out segregation, to erase all forms of Jim Crowism, and to come into full citizenship.” African Americans were to lead this charge by thinking of themselves as only Americans and demanding that they be recognized as such.<sup>68</sup>

In the editorial, the *Defender* stressed nation over race and compared being a “Negro” to a “religion.” African Americans “were Africans first; then . . . became Americans through circumstances. As the religious aspect of our lives is subordinate to our national life, there is no need for advertising our religion. No other race group does it, why should we?” the editorialist argued.<sup>69</sup> It is curious that the editorialist considered racial identification a “religion,” as if it was a voluntary dogmatic practice. But, as religions go, there were certain proscriptions, traditions, and rituals involved. These external forces, which were foundational for character and community building, dictated behaviors and responses. Possibly connecting how religions set proscribed boundaries and limits on individual impulses, the *Defender* viewed the belief in and

---

<sup>68</sup> “We Are Americans,” A2.

<sup>69</sup> “We Are Americans,” A2.

acceptance of the denigrating baggage associated with being labeled “Negro” as also inhibiting one’s natural inclination and thus affecting race progress.

By equating race as a religion, thereby insisting that race was subordinate to nation and nationality, the *Defender* reminded readers, especially those who considered pastors race leaders, that religion and the dictates of ministers must take a backseat to the urgency of obtaining equal citizenship. The church and its leaders were viewed as outdated and reflected a politics that was neither progressive nor modern. “We Are Americans” announced that members of the race were just as dangerous as those members of society who actively denied what the Fourteenth Amendment put in place 50 years earlier. Writing that some blacks were “working unconsciously with those who are opposed to recognizing us as Americans are many of our own Race who have not considered the seriousness of their offenses,” the editorial underscored that there were leaders who did not embody a modern race consciousness.<sup>70</sup> The editorial did not state what those “offenses” were, but the tone of the editorial and the explicit reference to the Fourteenth Amendment suggested that a subservient consciousness and passivity were two of the violations.

“We Are Americans” evoked a sense of patriotism by reminding African Americans that by law and toil they were citizens and, therefore, must demand that recognition. Similarly, “Let’s Be American,” an editorial that appeared two weeks later in the January 21, 1928 edition of the *Defender*, reiterated the importance of demanding of United States citizenship. In “Let’s Be American,” the editorialist announced that “American citizenship means nothing if it does not carry with it the right to be men and women in every sense of the words. If it does not does not insure protection against discrimination and injustices, against peonage and slavery, against concubinage and mobbery, it means less than nothing to us.” Although this declaration sounded

---

<sup>70</sup> “We Are Americans,” A2.

like a denouncement of citizenship, it was not, for the editorialist insisted that “any person has the right to exercise all of these evils against the man or woman who will accept them.” The editorialist conceded African Americans had “accepted them. . . although our Constitution—ours by right of heritage and sacrifice—has provided protection against them.”<sup>71</sup> “Let’s Be Americans” implored African Americans to view themselves as Americans and adopt what they believed was an American ethos. This American sensibility demanded rights, showed determination, would “wage war on any cognomen that sets us apart from any other American,” and would no longer view privileges granted as “donations,” but privileges that were “due” because “our sacrifices at home and on the battlefield have guaranteed it for us.” Like the *Defender*’s editorial “The Color Line Must Go!,” “Let’s Be Americans” was radical and militant in tone. The editorial presented an “ultimatum of real citizenship”—without addressing potential consequences—and alluded to some sort of uprising. The editorial also insisted African Americans perform citizenship by “act[ing] the part, and it will be true in fact as well as in word.” Still, as the “Let’s Be Americans” intimated, acting as an American meant embracing war, self-determination, and the threat of physical aggression—all signifiers of masculinity.<sup>72</sup>

Readers reacted to “Blot Out Color Line” article and subsequent editorials published in 1928 in the *Defender* with writers attributing the proposed resolution to the *Defender*, and not to civic and church leaders as mentioned in the article. Joseph Irvin of Dayton, Ohio, wished “to congratulate the W. G. W. on its program for 1928.” Irvin believed that “no doubt every Race man and woman would like to see this program worked out. However, there is plenty of work to do and we have no place in our ranks for drones and slackers.” Similar to the *Defender*’s editorials, that potentially labeled and marginalized those individuals who would not subscribe or

---

<sup>71</sup> “Let’s Be American,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 21, 1928, A2.

<sup>72</sup> “Let’s Be American,” A2.

perform the dictates of the new race consciousness, Irvin, too, considered those individuals “drones and slackers,” and thus outside of this presumed monolithic black community. In his letter to the editor, Irvin wanted to relay to the World Greatest Weekly (W. G. W.) and its readers the importance of the upcoming 1928 presidential election and shore up the black vote for the candidate whom he believed would benefit the race. Potential Democratic Party nominee Frank B. Willis of Ohio, Irvin’s home state, was the man he wanted African Americans to cast their votes for. In his letter, Irvin stated that if Willis was nominated he would “likely be opposed by Al Smith, who is wet, but we trust the Race will not be misled by any 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment stuff when the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> are of the utmost importance to the Race, and Willis is a believer in the enforcement of the Constitution.” For Irvin, the issue of prohibition, although important to the black community for it spoke to tenets of respectability, paled in comparison to ensuring and upholding citizenship rights. “If we as a race really want to see the Defender policy carried out let us support Frank B. Willis in every way possible, and by so doing help to blot out the color line.”<sup>73</sup> Irvin, who conflated the resolution with the editorials, credited the *Defender* with the Blot Out campaign, thereby imagined the press not just as a medium that reported the news, but also as a race leader and spokesman.

Jules de Prado, whose city of origin is unknown, wrote a letter to the editor, “If to Seek Justice Is to Admit Inferiority—Then We’re Guilty,” that challenged the *Defender* on not being racially progressive enough. De Prado, who was likely responding to the “Drop Title ‘Negro’” article and not the *Defender*’s editorial, believed the erasure of the color line was an “ambitious program,” and futile because “the color line is here to stay . . . because intelligent people wish it so.” For de Prado, the color line was literal and real, not figurative and psychological. He

---

<sup>73</sup> Joseph Irvin, “To Remove Color Line,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 28, 1928, A2.

understood the resolution to mean intermixing and the erasure of not only a black consciousness, but also of black people. He wrote that “there are those . . . who favor intermarriage, but they are the people who think the Race will benefit from contact with a better article.” Here, de Prado alluded to a mentality that believed that “white blood in a Colored person was an indication of excellence.”<sup>74</sup> Physical markers of miscegenation and the language associated with it, such as “good hair,” psychologically left an imprint that had blacks associating good with white and evil with black. The result, according to de Prado was that blacks “feared the white man, and idolized his marks among us.”<sup>75</sup>

Fortunately, according to de Prado, this line of thinking or consciousness was disappearing. “Race people,” in 1928, he wrote, “are realizing that their physical traits are not to be shamefully borne. We are acquiring race pride, the absence of which has long been a detriment to us.” In de Prado’s opinion, the 1928 resolution, that blacks should no longer say “I am a Colored Man,” would undo any race pride thus acquired. He interpreted the resolution adopted by black leaders as an admittance of black inferiority and as an endorsement for miscegenation. He accused the *Defender* of advocating for race-mixing as “the only equalizing force left to us. Implying that we are not equal to our friend, the Caucasian, and that our only hope is in being absorbed by him.” De Prado concluded his letter by stating the expression and the identifier “I am a Colored man” would continue “not as a confession of imperfections, but as the fearless assertion of one who knows that his ancestry is of the best.”<sup>76</sup>

*Defender* reader, C. A. Lewis, presumably from Chicago, also addressed the proposed resolution for 1928. In “It Has Never Been Done,” Lewis first identified himself as “being a

---

<sup>74</sup> Jules de Prado, What the People Say, “If to Seek Justice Is to Admit Inferiority—Then We’re Guilty!” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 14, 1928, A2.

<sup>75</sup> De Prado, “If to Seek Justice,” A2.

<sup>76</sup> De Prado, “If to Seek Justice,” A2.

regular and constant reader of *The Chicago Defender* thereby being able to vouch for the genuine consistency in this persistent stand by the paper and its editor and publisher.”<sup>77</sup> Lewis, unlike de Prado, supported the resolution. Lewis believed anyone with “the courage of his convictions with the love of glory and honor, liberty and freedom in his heart, would rally to this new mental and spiritual battlecry. Far in the front would be found this Prince of Men, Robert S. Abbott and his great publication.” Lewis, like Arthur King, viewed the black press’s editors as race leaders. Accordingly, positioning black America as de facto followers. Lewis stated that it was not just Abbott’s fight but also “the 123,000,000 freedom and liberty loving American citizens who respect this government and obey its laws,” which included the “twelve or fifteen million of us American citizens known and designated Negro, Colored or Afro-American.” Unlike de Prado, Lewis viewed the 1928 resolution as a sign of race progress and a marker of New Negro consciousness. For those not on board with the new resolution, Lewis labeled them “weak-kneed, yellow-livered, Cheshire cat grinning, slippery [and] selfish.” Clearly, representative of the old Negro.<sup>78</sup>

The differences between de Prado’s and Lewis’s responses were stark and spoke to how each black man reacted to this strategy of obtaining racial equality. Although de Prado most likely misinterpreted the resolution’s dictate of renouncing “I am a Colored Man” as a call to reject blackness and as an endorsement for race mixing, his interpretation, as well as Lewis’s letter, spoke to how each man reacted to representations of black masculinity, the construction of a new black consciousness, and citizenship in the early twentieth century.

Lewis’s and de Prado’s letters addressed the issue of representation of black manhood and a black male consciousness. Both men were concerned with being associated with an “old”

---

<sup>77</sup> C. A. Lewis, “It Has Never Been Done,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 21, 1928, A2.

<sup>78</sup> Lewis, “It Has Never Been Done,” A2.

Negro consciousness or mentality. For de Prado, an outdated consciousness feared white men and, yet, took pride in the “marks among us.” These “marks,” or body markers such as “good” hair, straighter noses, or lighter skin, although a physical reminder of miscegenation—either by force or consent—held status among African Americans, and to a limited degree, within white society. It was the psychological undoing that these markers have merit that concerned de Prado. “Race people are realizing that their physical traits are not to be shamefully borne,” he wrote.<sup>79</sup> Thus, for de Prado, the “color line” was about the “physical” and real—not an illusionary color line. A new Negro consciousness would see the merit in a fixed color line, one that appreciated the physical characteristics of black individuals. For de Prado, a transformation of consciousness would begin with the appreciation and investment in blackness. Hence his comment that “intelligent people” want the color line to remain because they already have reached the epiphany.

Although de Prado did not address citizenship directly, he inferred that any worthy citizen would not believe in black inferiority. Thus, a strong race consciousness was foundational to the fight for equality. Lewis was also concerned with black male representation, feeling that any black man who let the “color line” impede his progress was equally demonstrative of an “old” Negro. Lewis’s citizenship was not based on race first, *per se*; his stemmed from a patriotic citizenship, one that valued the spirit of the Constitution. When he rhetorically asked “who backs those resolutions?” and responded with “every mother’s son and daughter of us who, having the courage of his convictions with the love of glory and honor, liberty and freedom in his heart,” and called on, first, the “123,000,000 freedom and liberty loving American citizens,” and then the millions African Americans, Lewis was asking black men to think of themselves,

---

<sup>79</sup> De Prado, “If to Seek Justice,” A2.



psychologically, as worthy and equal citizens, first, and racially identified citizens, second. Still, race also played a role in Lewis's new Negro consciousness. He, too, was concerned that an "old" consciousness would thwart progress. Those individuals who were "weak-kneed," "yellow-livered," and "slippery," were not only representatives of trickery and the cowardice, they were also not self-determined. Lewis did not consider himself among this ilk, and definitely not Robert Abbott or the *Defender*.

### **Who Is the New Negro?: Contesting Masculinities**

After the war, the migration of southern blacks and West Indians to northern metropolises increased. As been documented by many historians, the *Chicago Defender* was one of the main organs to promote southern black migration to urban centers such as Chicago after the war. However, with the influx of migrants and immigrants, jobs, housing, and codes of conduct were points of contention between the recent transplants and the blacks who already lived in the North and believed they were making progress in racial equality.

As journalist Enoch Waters pointed out, "A little noticed schism within the race emerged with the arrival of southern blacks in northern cities during the early decades of the century. Northern urbanites resented the intrusion of the rural southerners who brought with them living styles and a culture long abandoned by the earlier immigrants, now citified, and other who had never been south of the cities in which they dwelled."<sup>80</sup> As Waters reminded, this "schism" was not just specific to African Americans. "Native" born whites, too, also held some animosity toward white ethnics who were now immigrating to the United States. Yet, as Waters pointed out, "the clash in cultures among Negroes was a throwback to the pre-Emancipation era when the

---

<sup>80</sup> Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press* (Chicago: 1987), 85.

house slaves, living in close contact with the master's family, were gradually alienated from those working in the fields and eventually regarded as a coarser breed."<sup>81</sup> The resentment that black northerners felt toward recent migrants and immigrants stemmed from the belief that "whites assumed all Negroes were alike." Black urbanites had adopted, or, at the very least, subscribed to, the codes of behavior of whites "in their efforts to conform and achieve recognition as equals." The recent transplant's clothing, behavior, and accent, as well as the competition for employment threatened the very foundation of respectability for which northern blacks stood.<sup>82</sup>

One of the vehicles that helped lessen the cultural schism was the black press. An examination of newspaper articles during the peak of the migration movements demonstrated how the black press and their readers were ambivalent about fully embracing recent migrants. On the one hand, the black press was sympathetic to black southern men and wanted black men to move out of the South so they could have the opportunity to exercise their manhood. Thus, article and editorials underscored that northern cities were the best places for these recent migrants to live. But, on the other hand, the marked cultural sensibilities and behaviors of southerners were not reflective of how black northerners wished to be perceived. The black press, based on the assumption that northern blacks already embodied and performed a more modern and progressive urban sensibility indistinguishable from white northerners, marginalized and policed those blacks who did not or were unable to conform to a specific code of conduct.

As if it needed an explanation, the January 1923 the *Amsterdam News* printed an editorial "Why Negroes Leave the South." Although probably not listed in order of importance, the fourteen-point list succinctly informed readers of the advantages the North had over the South

---

<sup>81</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 85.

<sup>82</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 85.

for black southerners. At the top of the list was “unjust treatment.” The following four pertained to voting rights and protection under the law, another four pertained to wages and labor, adequate schools, and the reuniting of family members, as well as freedom from fear of “night riders” (which, auspiciously, also pertained to protection under the law), and “a longing of free air.”<sup>83</sup> The editorial did not provide further commentary, possibly since none was needed.

Northern black presses had been riddled with editorials, articles, and commentaries on northern migration since before the war, and would occasionally post how many blacks left the south and returned. Although government officials reported often on the labor shortage in northern mills and that race prejudice also existed in the North, the black press still encouraged black men to move North in order to escape “unjust treatment” and breathe “free air.”<sup>84</sup>

Newspapers acted as labor agents, advertising which factories and manufacturing companies were willing to hire blacks, especially those blacks who were willing to accept low wages and work their way up in a company. The *Amsterdam News* reprinted an editorial from the *Pittsburgh Courier* that informed black men that Westinghouse Manufacturing Company was providing employment opportunities for black men. The editorial stated that “The Courier encourages our men to enter such an institution, and enter it with a knowledge that the beginning is at the bottom. This is the place where the best men of today began in their earlier years.” Invoking a self-made man ethos, the editorial further marshaled black men to “go to this great plant. Begin at the bottom, with both eyes on the top. Give the very best you have for the pay received. Work every day, and work well. The man who does his job the best is on his way to another position with more pay.”<sup>85</sup> This editorial, as well as others, tried to mold and encourage a

---

<sup>83</sup> “Why Negroes Leave the South,” *Amsterdam News*, Jan. 17, 1923, 12.

<sup>84</sup> “The New Migration from the South,” *Amsterdam News*, Dec. 27, 1922, 8; “Why Negroes Leave the South,” 12.

<sup>85</sup> “By Our Contemporaries: Can You Work Up?” *Amsterdam News*, Dec. 13, 1922, 12.

mode of masculinity that could be emblematic of the race. Hard working, determined, long-suffering, and dependable were qualities they wanted to impress upon recent migrants. In some respects, the black press was attempting to correct and counter negative perceptions of black male southerners as lazy and unreliable. Yet, stereotypes about black men still held weight. For example, in another reprint from the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Amsterdam News* published “Pittsburgh Wants Men with Families: John T. Clark, of Urban League Says Plants Are Calling for Stable Men.” Although black men were encouraged to move to Pittsburgh to work in plants, the article announced that the plant only wanted black men with families to relocate to the area since they were “steady” and “reliable.” Single black men were considered “floaters—they will not work steady nor can they be dependent upon.” According to the article, Clark “is in the position to place hundreds of married men with families who care to come North and settle down. The Urban League will use its facilities for seeing that families of such men are properly located and settled into their homes here.”<sup>86</sup>

Although black newspapers assigned negative connotations to southern black masculinity, this was not to say that they were not sympathetic to the limitations black men experienced in the South. Indeed, it was probably these sympathetic accounts that tempered black northerners hostilities toward recent transplants. Editorials, such as “Hell and Heaven” attempted to get northerners who had never experienced the South, or those southerners who had adopted northern sensibilities, to relate to the daily emasculation black men experienced. The editorial stated that “you must have lived in the South in order to understand and know the extent

---

<sup>86</sup> “Pittsburgh Wants Men with Families: John T. Clark, of Urban League say Plants Are Calling for Stable Men,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 13, 1922, 1. Interestingly, the black press’s and the Urban League’s promotion of black men to move to Pittsburgh started to take its toll. Although sympathetic to the plight of black southern men, in “Men Anxious to Leave the South,” the Urban League encouraged men to wait to come to Pittsburgh until a job was secured and for the climate to become warmer, since southern men were not used to such cold weather.

of its meanness, its crimes and its outrages. The Southern newspapers published by black people devote most of their space to church news and long contributions written by the ‘leading spirits’ and it is not deemed wise to print the whole truth.”<sup>87</sup> Along with the potential daily assaults to one’s psyche and body, the editorial also emphasized that black southern newspapers were also restrained in exercising their power and were limited to using the church as a means of racial progress, a platform that many black northerners had deemed outdated. Again, trying to evoke some sympathy, if not empathy, from its northern readers, the editorial continued, “you have got to be a black man and live in the south to appreciate the magnitude of its crimes and injustices. The atmosphere down there is not right and those who breathe it become contaminated and defiled. . . . they become enslaved in mind, stunted in soul, muscle bound and disconsolate. They think as serfs and not as free men.”<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, the editorial mentioned that race prejudice was also found above the Mason and Dixon line, thus it was not solely the discriminatory practices of the South but something more insidious, the editorial suggested, that prevented black males from evolving from black men who were serfs to self-determined, free-thinking black men. Again, the press was not saying that southern black men were not *men*, they just viewed them as not as evolved as northern black men, and thus, an arrested masculinity.

Still, negative stereotypes regarding black southern masculinity remained (and continue to remain) within the cultural discourse. Despite race prejudice being universal and the emasculation of black manhood not specific to any region, the belief persisted that southern masculinity was disparaged. John Gray, a former southerner and current Brooklyn resident, wrote in his 1927 letter to the editor that “Negroes who live in Dixie and know of other places that afford greater opportunities for them and their children . . . and refuse to leave these

---

<sup>87</sup> “Hell and Heaven,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 30, 1923, 12.

<sup>88</sup> “Hell and Heaven,” 12.

damnable places, are absolutely spineless and have no courage and don't want anything better than a shack and 'his place.'"<sup>89</sup> It was not the unwedded black man that was the target of Gray's anger and whose manhood Gray put to question, but it was the married black man who could not protect his wife and daughter from being raped and his son from being lynched who was representative of subpar black manhood. Relying on the trope of the Uncle Tom, Gray wrote that the black southern man was "ever ready to defend the South . . . He can furnish splendid alibis for his true white southerners and friends, the ignorant fool." Inscribing the Uncle Tom as a man who justified southern cruelties, Gray continued that this man would rationalize that he could not leave the South because of his "stock" and "real estate . . . when truthfully most of you have heavily mortgaged property, one or two ducks, an unfed jackass and a shack you call a house."<sup>90</sup> Mapping southern black manhood as ignorant, foolish, irrational, cowardice, delusional, and weak and inept because he cannot protect his family, Gray, in turn, coded black northern masculinity as courageous and self-determined, stating that "courageous men will leave this hell on earth immediately, even if they must leave with boots and shoes." He advised southern men to not "listen to your 'preacher,' all he wants is a living from you. He is being told by white people to help keep you there. I am for Christianity, but not that kind which comes from those dumb, selfish 'Uncle Tom' sky pilots who mean our race no good. Get out tonight." Having been "from" Dixie himself, the tone of Gray's letter indicated that it was more than just an opus to incite migration. He was not encouraging married men to move to exercise their rights as providers, which had been the call during the earlier years of the 1920s. Indeed, Gray's problem with southern black manhood was that it could not legally or rightfully protect its family in that

---

<sup>89</sup> "Plain Speaking," *Chicago Defender*, July 23, 1927, A2.

<sup>90</sup> "Plain Speaking," A2.

environment. Thus, any married man who did not want to remove himself from the yoke of southern emasculation was an Uncle Tom.<sup>91</sup>

Gray's letter to the editor did receive a response. In "Race Problem 'Solutionist,'" the unnamed writer took offense at Gray's assumptions, and the *Defender's* seeming endorsement of Gray's pejorative assessment of southern masculinity. The writer wrote that

We must admit we can see but little value in it, save as an exposition of an unbelievable lack of understanding of his subject and economic conditions of the Race. [W]e [do not] have any love for Negro apologists, but we do say, and 'unashamed of the stigma of 'Uncle Tom' and 'fool,' as used in the gentlemanly article in the Defender, that all of the good white people are not in the North nor all of the bad ones in the South. There is much than can be said in truth for both sides, even though Mr. Gray says the 'Uncle Tom is ever ready to defend the South.'<sup>92</sup>

The writer pushed back against the mappings of the South and, by extension, southern black men, as regressive and lacking in manliness. He challenged those stereotypes and assumptions about southern masculinity, particularly the assumption that southern men needed advisors on how to behave. The writer's comment that Gray had a "lack of understanding" underscored the perception that there was a regional disconnect in not only cultural attitudes but also in masculinity performance.

The stark contrast in performance and representation of southern versus northern masculinity within these urban spaces during the 1920s was further complicated by the immigration of West Indians. Similar to black southerners, West Indians brought their own specific brand of behavior and consciousness to such cities as New York and Chicago. Thus, it was probably more than just curiosity that drove many Harlemites to the Peoples' Educational Forum to hear Chandler Owen on a Sunday afternoon in February 1923. Owen, co-editor of the

---

<sup>91</sup> "Plain Speaking," A2.

<sup>92</sup> "Race Problem 'Solutionist,'" *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 3, 1927, A2.

leftist newspaper, *The Messenger*, spoke on “The Problem of the Relationship between the American and West Indian Negroes” to a “packed audience,” as reported by the *Amsterdam News*.<sup>93</sup> Owen, first informing his audience that West Indian migration to the United States, similar to all migrations including the “Pilgrim Fathers,” was economic, proceeded to outline the “three reasons that are the cause of the friction between the American and the West Indian.”<sup>94</sup>

First, undermining. The West Indian will accept lower wages, and when he gets into a place will bring in all of his friends and crowd out the Americans. The second charge is the claim of superiority. The British West Indian are more hated than those from other islands because they are more offensive in their assertions of superiority and there are more of them. The third cause is failing to naturalize and thus not able to help solve the problem they created.<sup>95</sup>

Owen offered two solutions to the West Indian problem: “limitation on immigration, and second scattering of the West Indians into other parts of the country, which. . . would have the same effect as the scattering of the American Negroes.”<sup>96</sup> Owen concluded his talk by stressing he had no “national prejudices and called upon all Americans and West Indians to unite and fight for the betterment of conditions affecting them as a race.”<sup>97</sup>

Eliminating economic competition seemed to be the motivator for limiting the number of West Indians in industrialized areas. A *Defender* editorial, “Help Wanted,” demonstrated the perceived threat felt by native-born blacks toward immigrants and how the impact that their presence had on jobs and the procurement of citizenship rights. The editorialist wrote that “no other group of people in the United States receive more direct benefit than the Colored-American from the government’s policy of restricted immigration.”<sup>98</sup> The editorial quoted a *Wall Street*

---

<sup>93</sup> “West Indian and American Negroes: Relationship Discussed By Chandler Owen of ‘Messenger,’” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb. 28, 1923, 2.

<sup>94</sup> “West Indian and American Negroes,” 2.

<sup>95</sup> “West Indian and American Negroes,” 2.

<sup>96</sup> “West Indian and American Negroes,” 2.

<sup>97</sup> “West Indian and American Negroes,” 2.

<sup>98</sup> “Help Wanted,” *Chicago Defender*, May 26, 1923, 12.



*Journal* article that mentioned the panic that the southern economy was experiencing due to southern blacks migrating North where “there is a general shortage of common labor and wages are high. Workers who come send back for their friends and the movement grows.” As a result, “Southern authorities are now seriously considering the effect a labor scarcity will have upon the area that is now ready to plant in cotton.”<sup>99</sup> By no means did “Help Wanted” seem to be advocating for blacks to stay in the South and take advantage of the panic that the Southern economy was experiencing. Instead, the *Defender* viewed the effects of black migration as a crippling influence on the southern economy and as a demonstration of the importance of black labor. Thus, anticipating the wage and job competition, they concluded that

We should be among the foremost to oppose the passage of such legislation, as we feel sure the Federation of labor will do, as we would be the ones hardest hit. With conditions as they now exist we have a pretty fair chance of coming into our own. It is highly essential for our workers who are not blazing the way to do the tasks assigned them ...In this way only can we indelibly stamp our worth and usefulness as an important cog in the great American industrial machine.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, it simply was not only labor and wages, but also how labor and wages symbolized citizenship and masculinity. The fact that some West Indians did not act to become naturalized citizens was a point of contention for many African Americans because they viewed this refusal as a demonstration of superiority. This air of superiority, for many African American men, translated into an assault on their masculinity. In his talk, Owen discussed some of the cultural differences that helped shape West Indian consciousness, such as their approach to resolving legal issues. Owen mentioned that West Indians were prone to litigation, whereas American blacks would try to settle out of court. He continued, “British people are more law abiding. Americans more inclined to lynch law,” and that West Indians, while litigious, were “more

---

<sup>99</sup> “Help Wanted,” 12.

<sup>100</sup> “Help Wanted,” 12.

submissive and inclined to boot-licking.” Clearly, Owen maneuvered to challenge and make apparent how West Indian masculinity was different from that of American blacks.

Holland Thompson, history professor at the College of the City of New York, viewed West Indian masculinity as having a negative influence on northern black manliness and noticed a marked difference in attitude in blacks “north of the Mason and Dixon line.” Addressing his findings to the 1923 American History Professors Association meeting, Thompson stated that the level of disaffection with racial conditions among northern blacks was increasing, and he believed that West Indians were unduly influencing this discontent. He claimed that “for years” blacks, especially southern blacks, had worked in cooperation with white sympathizers “to demand all the rights of citizenship and to oppose every form of segregation and discrimination,” which resulted in northern migration, and now the West Indians who moved to these northern cities, unaccustomed to racism, were passing on their “resentment” to black northerners. Not only were West Indians to blame for the rise in discontent, but also, according to Thompson, “the increased circulation of newspapers for Negroes and the encouragement given by publications to the contentions that Negroes must resist oppression by force, if necessary.”<sup>101</sup>

## **Policing Behavior**

In May 1919, taking on the role and tone of parent, the *Chicago Defender* printed an editorial, “Where We Are Lacking,” in which it laid out codes of conduct for northern behavior. One of the greater offenses that had been witnessed, it seemed, was “corner loafing.” “So great a nuisance has it become those respectable women and young girls shrink from running that gantlet of foul-spoken, leering loafers. Professionals and business men are loud in their

---

<sup>101</sup> “Discontent in North Growing: Professor Thinks American Negroes Influenced by West Indians,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 10, 1923, 2.

complaints against these insects who block the entrances to their offices and stores, preventing ingress and egress,” the editorialist observed. Another offense that had been witnessed was improper behavior on a street car. The editorial instructed that one should “Enter the cars quietly, have your fares ready, and ask for your transfer at the time of paying your fare. Once inside the car, sit quietly and avoid loud talk with your neighbor. Above all things do not attempt a conversation with any one at the opposite end of the car or several seats removed from you. The other passengers are not interested in what you have to say, and the way you say it may give offense.” Standards of politeness were also reiterated. *Defender* reminded readers to say “Excuse me” and “I beg your pardon,” for these “old-time courtes[ies]” marked one as having “the stamp of good breeding and always calls for a favorable notice of the person using such civility.”<sup>102</sup>

The *Defender* concluded “Where We Are Lacking” by stating that

Gentlemanly and unobtrusive conduct on the part of a man or woman always excites favorable impression. And we must not forget those of us living on the avenues and boulevards. Do not sit in the open windows and upon the steps half clad. Do not arrange your toilet in view of the public. These things should be done behind drawn blinds. There is no reason why a Colored neighborhood should be marked by conduct on the part of its residents that belongs to a day that should have long since passes. Such practices may find ready excuse upon the country cross roads of the South, but people living in large cities are intolerable of such things and mark the neighborhoods where these things are observed as plague spots.

The *Defender* called upon the pastors, who “two or three times a week . . . have large audiences to which they can address” the conduct of their congregation, as well as “render especial service in dispersing the large crowds that congregate around the churches.”<sup>103</sup> Clearly, southern blacks needed to be educated on proper northern behavior.

---

<sup>102</sup>“Where We Are Lacking,” *Chicago Defender*, May 17, 1919, 20.

<sup>103</sup> “Where We Are Lacking,” 20.

No doubt the sting of not being welcomed in the North, plus being reprimanded and ostracized by blacks, many of whom were recent transplants themselves, was demoralizing to southern blacks, especially since, as Waters pointed out, southern hospitality dictated the reverse would not have been the same. The outward presentation of southern blacks, such as “the farm dress, the accent, loud talking, food preferences, emotional worship services, types of entertainment characteristic of the rural south demonstrated lack of refinement in the eyes of northern blacks,” made southern blacks marked targets. And, as Waters mentioned, northern blacks “assumed whites were offended so they too showed their displeasure by refusing to associate with the strangers.”<sup>104</sup>

Although attire, language, and public behavior—as markers of regional difference—were easier to detect for blacks, the *Defender* realized that this was not the case for whites, and even if it was, the lack of jobs and housing flattened all racial signifiers. “Where We Are Lacking” was written for southern blacks to dictate model behavior so as to not to be thought of as one of those “insects” or “loafers.” The editorial, “Some ‘Don’t,’” which appeared on the same page as “Where We Are Lacking,” acknowledged a race-first and uplift approach, suggesting behaviors could be changed if policed.

“Some ‘Don’t’” confirmed the hostility that “certain classes of citizens” had against recent migrants. However, the *Defender* suggested that it was not blacks who were the primary and most intense source of “agitation,” but instead whites, since these migrants were “supplanting white laborers in various branches of work.”<sup>105</sup> The editorialist wrote that white agitators, “in seeking a remedy to prevent laborers from the Southland securing employment and making an honest living for themselves and their families,” resorted to “vile” remarks “and

---

<sup>104</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 85.

<sup>105</sup> “Some ‘Don’t,’” *Chicago Defender*, May 17, 1919, 20.

unlawful acts committed against the men and women who have come to this and other cities of the North. . . while the Southern white is coming in droves on the same train and we hear no kicks from any one.” The *Defender* admitted that “some of the people coming to this city have seriously erred in their conduct in public. . . much to the humiliation of all respectable classes of citizens. . . and by so doing. . . have given our enemies ground for complaint.”<sup>106</sup> This editorial was more sympathetic in tone as compared to “Where We Are Lacking.” The *Defender* agreed that the public conduct of some blacks did not reflect the progressive sensibilities that they wanted to be seen as having. Yet, the *Defender* offered that this behavior was secondary to the larger issue—the denial of citizenship rights and equal opportunity—that bad conduct was just another excuse to deny black men the access to protect and earn a living for themselves and families. Thus, this denial was not solely a northern or a southern black issue, but a race issue, and to this end, according to the *Defender*, “it [is] absolutely necessary that a united effort should be made on the part of all law-abiding citizens to endeavor to warn and teach those who by their acts bring reproach upon the Colored people of this city to strictly observe the laws, city ordinances and customs and so conduct themselves as to reflect credit upon themselves: by so doing it will disarm those who are endeavoring to discredit our Race.”<sup>107</sup>

It was the policing of behaviors in public spaces that the *Defender* and black urbanites were concerned with and not necessarily values—which were a true test of one’s character. The history of social reform was based on the intersections of citizenship as it related to character building and the private sphere, especially when it came to women. However, since the public sphere was considered a “male” domain, the dictates offered in both editorials were gendered and assumed to be addressed toward black men. Indeed, many of the “Don’t” had to do with

---

<sup>106</sup> “Some ‘Don’t,’” 20.

<sup>107</sup> “Some ‘Don’t,’” 20.

behaviors exhibited in public spaces. For example, “Don’t use vile language in public spaces,” “don’t act discourteously to other people in public places,” “don’t appear on the street with old dust caps, dirty aprons and ragged clothes,” or “don’t get intoxicated and go out on the street insulting women and children and make a beast of yourself—some one may act likewise with your wife and children,” addressed male behavior. The qualifier of the “public” in each item demonstrated the concern for black representation and the link between behavior and status. If one did not perform or act appropriately in public, then he or she was not worthy of the responsibilities that went along with citizenship.

Issues pertaining to vice and licentiousness, too, were of concern. Gambling, hanging around pool halls, and being a “beer can rusher” did not lend to respectable male behavior. And, of equal importance, when it came to employment, the *Defender* wanted to make sure that black males were not seen as undermining or “supplanting white laborers.” Advice such as “Don’t abuse or violate the confidence of those who give you employment,” “don’t work for less wages than being paid people doing the same kind of work,” and “don’t be made a tool or strike breaker for any corporation or firm” served to reinforce masculinity traits and also alleviate white fear.<sup>108</sup> The policing of behavior helped to construct and maintain a pattern of behavior which, one hoped, would result in full citizenship while also neutralizing and quarantining those negative elements that would cause an imbalance and disrupt the hopes of an utopian society.

In June 1921, the *Defender* ran a contest to find the best kept lawns. The purpose of the contest was twofold: first, it emphasized a spirit of showing pride in one’s neighborhood and property, and, second, it served to assuage the “dirty propaganda” that blacks “do not take care of [their] homes, and that once [they] have bought a building the value of it depreciates because

---

<sup>108</sup> “Some ‘Don’t,’” 20.

of lack of care.” With regard to the latter, the paper felt it was up to them to “disprove any such rot,” and so the hunt was on for the best kept lawns.<sup>109</sup> The *Defender*’s contest was concerned with issues of the public—the male domain, performance, and citizenship. The article contended that “by not only keeping the inside of our homes clean, as we do, but by also putting on the proper front, as we have not always done, the purpose of this propaganda can be defeated.” Hence, if the private or the domestic sphere was the female’s domain, and the public was the male—it was the appearance of the public sphere that will provide access to equal citizenship. Thus, men were encouraged to make sure they put on a proper front. The *Defender* asserted that this was for four reasons: “to increase the value of our property; to maintain as high as possible the street appearance of the neighborhoods in which we live; to prevent any reflection being cast upon industrious and careful people living in the vicinity because of outside appearances; and for the cultural influences which living in well kept surroundings provides.”<sup>110</sup>

By 1928, the reform through neighborhood beautification had worn thin for at least one *Defender* reader. Miss Zula Richardson wrote a letter to the editor stating that “it is a wonderful thing for a neighborhood to have the reputation of keeping their homes and lawns clean. I think it is just as important to be just as careful as to conduct.” Richardson then proceeded to name the exact location of where profane language was used in public, directed at a young messenger boy, and in front of two school-age girls. Richardson was in shock, noting that “I stopped to be certain my ears were not deceiving me.” After stating for a second time how she “waited so as to be a witness against such an uncouth man,” she then attributed this man’s and his female companion’s public rudeness to the regression of the race, asserting that “we wonder why children of today are so rude. How can they be otherwise when the older men and women fail to

---

<sup>109</sup> “Defender to Give Prizes for Best Kept Lawns,” *Chicago Defender*, June 4, 1921, 8.

<sup>110</sup> “Defender to Give Prizes,” 8.

use proper language in their presence?<sup>111</sup> To add to Richardson's shock was the neighborhood where this offense took place. She informed readers that "since 47<sup>th</sup> and Champlain have the reputation of being well kept by the residents, I hope this property owner will be careful of his language in the future. Yours for decency."<sup>112</sup> Richardson's letter to the editor can be seen as a way ordinary citizens started to police each other to make sure that the race was adhering to codes of public respectability. Her actions of writing and submitting a letter to the paper and providing identifying markers of the man and woman (who also had a baby) and their address, ensured that members of that neighborhood also policed their neighbors.

## **Gossip Columns**

Appearing benign and extremely entertaining, black newspapers featured columns that discussed sensational events that either entertainers or local individuals were engaged in. With an abundance of news, limited budget, and a small staff, black newspapers would often rely on creative ways to get information. Police blotters and "auxiliary volunteer staff" ("frustrated journalists forced by economic necessity to earn a living at other occupations") were often used as sources for accumulating information for print. Likewise, readers also supplied information that ranged from birth announcements to untoward activity. According to *Defender* journalist Enoch Waters, there were few qualms in deciding what to publish. The press "published it all, to the extent of [its] ability, on the theory that [these events] represented the sale of at least another copy of the paper." To this end, Waters added, the *Defender* "felt that each issue of the paper represented the most complete coverage of our community that was possible." Depending on the event, having one's name appear in the newspaper was a sign of status. Undoubtedly, having

---

<sup>111</sup> "Using Profane Language," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 28, 1928, A2.

<sup>112</sup> "Using Profane Language," A2.



one's name mentioned in a birth or wedding announcement or in a society page event was a marker of presumed (if only momentary) status and respectability, showcasing behaviors to be emulated. There were other columns, however, that were more vexed that similarly marked someone's status and behavior in society. The black press often relied on gossip columns, as a form of sensational journalism, to not only sell papers, but also to police community behavior and publicly ridicule individuals thought to be exhibiting behaviors that were believed detrimental to the race.<sup>113</sup>

Some readers did complain when their names were associated with untoward behaviors. Waters admitted that the *Defender* “got complaints, of course, but few had to do with the news being omitted. Most were that our reports lacked some detail information to the complainant, or contained some misstatement or typographical error. But they couldn't complain of being ignored.” Throughout its run, the *Defender* had several gossip-style columns, including “Back Door Stuff” and “Everybody Goes When The Wagon Comes,” to name a few. The latter, according to Waters, was a popular feature in the *Defender*, and its name was based on South Side Chicago police raids. Police raids were frequent at establishments known for running numbers and “after hour hideaways,” where people would congregate “merrily, but illegally, after the legal closing hours for nightclubs and taverns.” These raids, however, were mostly performance—“a show put on by the police to appease the complaining law abiding citizen.” Still, when the officers arrived, anyone present at the time of the raid was arrested, hence the title of the column, which was commonly referred to as “The Wagon.”<sup>114</sup>

“The Wagon” did not just report on the dregs of society whose behavior was thought to impede race progress; the feature also “carried bravos as well as brickbats” regarding community

---

<sup>113</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 166.

<sup>114</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 166.

members, some of whom wanted to construct an alternate public persona. Waters confessed that “The Wagon” was so popular that “many businessmen, professionals, politicians, social strivers, and others [were] willing to pay, and often did under the table, to have their names mentioned” in the column. Advertisers, aware that the feature was a site of heavy traffic, “begged to have their ads placed on the same page,” and, accordingly, a special rate was implemented for placement of an advertisement near the column. For those men interested in social striving, and whose reputation could handle negative association, being mentioned in “The Wagon” added an edge to their manliness. However, for others, being mentioned—or alluded to—carried dire consequences.<sup>115</sup>

Waters supplied an anecdote on Al Monroe, one of the writers for “The Wagon.” Making his rounds at the local after-hour bars and clubs, Monroe was approached by a patron who was at the establishment with his girlfriend. “Fearing” that Monroe would report this sighting, the visitor “told Al, ‘Hey, you put in the Wagon that I wasn’t here.’” Monroe, clearly keen to what the man wanted, yet possessing “a sense of humor,” reported in the “The Wagon” that “Bill Givens told the ‘Wagon’ at Phil’s after-hour spot on Tuesday night, ‘that he wasn’t there.’” Givens, who may or may not have possessed a sense of humor, but did have a wife, stormed the *Defender* looking to do bodily harm to Monroe. Fortunately, the police officer assigned to the press was in the office and was able to apprehend the man before any harm was done.<sup>116</sup>

Although Monroe came away unscathed—other than being “momentarily shaken” by the experience—not everyone associated with these policing sites were as lucky. Managing editor of the *Defender*, Lucius Harper, would determine the popularity of a feature by purposely excluding it from an issue and recording the number of complaints received because of its absence. On one

---

<sup>115</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 166–97.

<sup>116</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 167–68.

occasion, a wife asked her husband to buy a *Defender*. Unaware that “The Wagon” was intentionally missing, and believing that her husband happened to pick up a newspaper that was not sorted properly, she instructed him to buy another one. After receiving the next copy, and noticing the column missing, the wife accused her husband of tearing the page out because she suspected that there within would be evidence of him cheating. Although the husband denied the wrongdoing, she “insisted he was guilty of some misdemeanor that had been reported in the ‘Wagon.’” An argument, then a physical fight followed where “she beat him over the head with a wooden meat mallet, splitting his scalp, fracturing his skull [,] rendering him bloody and unconscious. Neighbors, overhearing the ruckus, called the police. She was arrested and he was taken to Provident Hospital for repairs.” Thus, what these gossip columns did, other than provide sensational entertainment, was to serve as a mechanism that shored up black collective behavior. As a controlling site, gossip columns helped to define what was normative behavior. To be mentioned in “The Wagon” served to create black distinctions—it meant either bravos or brickbats, or, rather, accolades or wooden mallets.<sup>117</sup>

Journalist Dan Burley also authored a gossip column. Burley, who was “shut-out” from “editing the Wagon by the seniority of Dave [Kellum] and Al [Monroe],” launched his own vehicles that chronicled the misadventures of locals. According to Waters, Burley’s “Backdoor Stuff” became a “serious rival” to Kellum and Monroe’s column, “not because of the gossip, though it exposed the foibles of a different audience, but because of the jive language [Burley] used.” Indeed, although Burley was a prolific journalist and able to write in several journalistic styles, his “Backdoor Stuff” seemed to target and appeal to a different audience based solely on his language and tone. Whereas the “Wagon” was written for and about African Americans who

---

<sup>117</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 167.

had already achieved some semblance of black northern middle-class respectability, “Backdoor” targeted those African Americans who did not totally subscribe to the emblematic models of respectable black masculinity, finding them soft. The Genteel Patriarch and the Black Dandy, although useful models of masculinity serving to advance civil rights, were outdated and did not reflect the current model of hegemonic masculinity which was coded as more assertive and powerful. The inclusion of “jive” added another layer of distinction in the cultural evolution of black masculinities. Proper language usage signaled elitism; jive, on the other hand, coded black men as hip, aggressive, street-savvy, and sexual—hence, manly.<sup>118</sup>

Burley, who did not have formal training in journalism—other than what he learned as a student at Wendell Philips High School in Chicago and through on-the-job-training at various black presses—seemed to personify and hold in esteem black men who embodied the valued characteristics of both the “old” and the “new” Negro. He subsequently created a “space” for them, both discursively and publicly, within the black press. “Backdoor Stuff” was humorous, entertaining, and informative. Along with the information Burley presented, readers would also send in stories, some retelling funny occurrences, some also written in jive. In “Diggin’ in the Graveyard of the Past,” a subsection of “Backdoor,” Alfred Littlejohn, who lived at 4352 Forrestville Avenue, asked readers if they “remember[ed] when Slick Shelby and William Sterling played basketball for Doolittle. . . and how both were supposed to be good wrestlers? Slick started woofin’ in the locker room with Sterling and a match was arranged for ‘em at Lincoln Center where Slick was hurriedly thrown on his ear.” The retelling of this story and use of broken English, were reminiscent of the black community that formed in those “black” spaces. Burley’s “Backdoor” was where black men could congregate and a certain type of working-class

---

<sup>118</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 168. Anna Pochmara, *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2011), 22.

blackness was privileged. Readers may not have known Shelby, but they probably took pleasure in him receiving his comeuppance, especially when they read that his mother “ran out on the mat and took Sterling off of Slick.”<sup>119</sup>

Frequently, these gossip columns would not name the person caught in an uncompromising or embarrassing situation, but would provide enough suggestive information that the community could police anyone fitting the description. Burley frequently disclosed rumored infidelities. Although it was the aggressive, street-savvy, sexualized northern black male that Burley seemed to admire, it was this same individual who also needed to be exposed and surveilled. In “Backdoor Runaround,” Burley informed readers of “the well known beauty operator whose car was wrecked in Indiana while she was here in the city.” Burley rhetorically asked “who was the guy driving it” and “what sweet young thing did he have with him?” Although the young gent could have been driving his sister to Indiana, the suggestion that a popular female business owner had been taken advantage of by a two-timing male would have caused readers to speculate on who these individuals were, and for people fitting the description to be more protective of their public reputation.<sup>120</sup> Still, the roving playboy in this anecdote was not the one whose respectability, reputation, and ego would be disrupted. In fact, being mentioned in “Runaround” would substantiate his creditability and his manliness.

Burley saw the benefits in performing and adhering to codes of black respectability, yet was critical of the hypocrisy that went along with it. He exposed “the brother who [was] a star boarder over on St. Lawrence avenue (sic) but who [told] friends he live[d] at the Hotel Grand,” and the “society ma’am” who used “linen tablecloths for sheets,” as well as the “South side (sic) gentleman who put his money in his shoe when ladies are around and then put his shoes under

---

<sup>119</sup> Dan Burley, “Backdoor Stuff,” *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 14, 1935, 19.

<sup>120</sup> Burley, “Backdoor Stuff,” 19.

his pillow” in his column so to unmask their over-performance of high-culture and respectability and to empower the black masses who were often chastised for not adhering to these performances of respectability. Thus, in “Backdoor” Burley exposed these public performances as a farce thereby contesting, if not challenging, tenets of respectability, northern masculinity.<sup>121</sup>

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the black press, acting as a civil rights agent, tried to evoke a race consciousness in its readers and helped to construct a new black man who would embody and represent the race in order to advance the cause of racial equality. Acting as an architect and cultural producer, the black press reimagined notions of black masculinity and leadership. These attributes, often challenged, were culturally and regionally informed. In order to ensure race progress, the black press not only became a site of constructing a racialized sensibility, but also became a site of surveillance whereby members of the community who did not adhere to codes of respectability were policed and marginalized.

---

<sup>121</sup> Burley, “Backdoor Stuff,” 19.

## Chapter 2: Racing the Field

In August 1935, W. E. B. Du Bois remarked on the new prominence of black athleticism in the United States. Two months earlier, Joe Louis had dropped the Italian Primo Carnera with a right to the jaw in front of an estimated 64,000 fans at Yankee Stadium. A month before that, at the Big Ten Track and Field Championships, Jesse Owens set three world records in less than an hour. Like many black journalists before him, Du Bois hitched Louis's ascendancy in the ring and Owens's accomplishments in track and field to the race's access to black equality. During the mid-1930s, Louis and Owens dominated their respective sports, and according to baseball historian Jules Tygiel, their success "provided ammunition" for the desegregation of baseball.<sup>1</sup>

Louis's win was especially symbolic in the summer of 1935 for several reasons. This win, many hoped, would take Louis one step closer to competing for the world heavyweight championship. Although heavyweight boxers such as Max Baer and Jim Braddock both refused to fight the black boxer while they were holding the heavyweight title for fear of losing it to a black man, the Louis-Carnera fight earned boxing handlers a sizeable draw. The gross receipts from the fight were well over \$320,000, with Carnera receiving thirty-five percent of the take (\$86,792.00) and Louis receiving eighteen percent (\$44,636.00).<sup>2</sup> The total attendance for the fight made it "the largest gate for a non-title fight . . . since the battle between [Jack] Dempsey and Jack Sharkey at the Yankee Stadium in 1927."<sup>3</sup> So, while for Baer and Braddock the reason to not fight Louis was simply an issue of black and white, or "black vs. white," for those who stood to capitalize off of racial difference, the only color that really mattered was green. And, in

---

<sup>1</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York, 2008), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Van Ness, "Plans Under Way to Match Louis with Baer of Schmeling for September Bout," *New York Times*, June, 27, 1935, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Van Ness, "Plans Under Way," 27.

1935, during the height of the depression, money—or the lack thereof—was of grave importance.

Additionally, the black press viewed Louis's defeat over Carnera as having international consequences for black/white relations. In 1930, Italy violated the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1928 by encroaching on Ethiopian territory that was outlined in the treaty. During the latter half of 1934 tensions escalated between the two countries resulting in the deaths of 150 Ethiopians. Soon after, Italy began to mobilize its forces to invade Ethiopia. Many African Americans expressed a political, racial, and spiritual kinship to Ethiopia and were "deeply concerned with the fate of that country which, except for Liberia, [was] the last independent stronghold of the black man on earth." Protests and rallies against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia held in Harlem after the Louis-Carnera bout often invoked the name of Joe Louis. During one rally, the national organizer of the Pan-African Reconstruction Association, Reverend Harold H. Williamson, Jr., declared, "let's get right up and tell why we want to knock out Mussolini like Joe Louis did Carnera." Another protestor extended Louis's muscular strength to the entire Ethiopian nation: "If Joe Louis could knock that giant Carnera on his ear . . . then Ethiopia's army could march into Rome and lick those Italians with their natural fists." Indeed, for many black Americans in 1935, Joe Louis was not just a pugilist; he was a racial ambassador, more specifically, a race man. He represented for black, as well as white, America the possibilities of economic and political success if a black man was given the opportunity to compete based on merit.<sup>4</sup>

The term "Race Man" was customarily bestowed upon men who held "high distinction" in "business, academics, and politics," and through these fields these esteemed men "best

---

<sup>4</sup> "Harlem Ponders Ethiopia's Fate: Negroes Stirred by Speakes Who Make Common Cause with Haile Sellassie," *New York Times*, July 14, 1935, E10; "Harlemites Rally to Ethiopia's Aid: 'Gigantic Meeting' Planned to Recruit Soldiers to Defend Haile Sellassie," *New York Times*, July 15, 1935, 7; and "Harlem Ponders Ethiopia's Fate," E10.



exemplified” leadership and black racial progress.<sup>5</sup> Hence, a “Race Man” was associated with the Talented Tenth, a term used by Du Bois to describe those select black males whom race activists had hoped would be leaders of and representatives for African Americans and inspire social change within the race.<sup>6</sup> Members of the Talented Tenth would have attained classical education as opposed to the industrial education that had been advocated by Booker T.

Washington. But, in 1935, no black scientist, educator, or poet could rally the black masses as did the former Ford Motor Company employee-turned-boxer, Joe Louis, and college athlete, Jesse Owens. Indeed, a reprint from the *Los Angeles Times* that appeared in the *Chicago Defender* suggested that instead of looking toward the elite or bourgeoisie to advance racial progress, this enterprise could be led by the “submerged tenth.” The opinion piece begins by lauding the accomplishments of Jesse Owens and Joe Louis who were able to compete and were subsequently victorious over their white opponents. It then shifted and conflated Owens and Louis with average black Americans, stating that “these people are among the most loyal of all Americans. Most of them are quiet, unassuming, wholesome people. They have intelligence, stamina and courage. Uncle Sam can count on them.”<sup>7</sup>

The discursive play on the term Talented Tenth, and even the title of the piece, “The ‘Submerged Tenth,’” suggested that it was through the hard work and the demonstration of respectable masculinity—as performed by average, middle- and working-class black Americans, and not the bourgeois, educated-dandy model—that black citizenship would be achieved. The title further intimated that the submerged tenth included those African Americans, unlike Louis

---

<sup>5</sup> Theresa E. Runstedtler, “In Sports the Best Man Wins: How Joe Louis Whipped Jim Crow,” in *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Amy Bass (New York, 2005), 48.

<sup>6</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of Today* (New York, 1903), 31.

<sup>7</sup> “Other Papers Say—: The ‘Submerged Tenth,’” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 10, 1935, p. 16

and Owens, whose hard work and loyalty went unnoticed within the public sphere and on the public stage, and who came from humble beginnings, similar to Owens and Louis. The submerged tenth, as the editorial alluded, were men who were bestowed with the positive attributes of masculinity: courage, stamina, humility, industry, and loyalty. Although such men were not world renowned athletes, their demonstration of these characteristics of manhood made them stalwart and worthy citizens.

Du Bois saw the impact that Louis and Owens had on American society in 1935. Along with Louis's success in the ring, Owens had made considerable positive racial strides in his sporting field. As a track champion, Owens had already set three new track world records and had tied a fourth. He was also elected captain of Ohio State University's track team, and this election marked the first time in OSU's athletic history that a black athlete had been chosen to lead a varsity sport.<sup>8</sup> Both Louis and Owens were regular fixtures in the black press, and even the white press rallied behind, celebrated, and supported the achievements of these two black men in the summer of 1935. Seizing upon the moment, Du Bois, the sport fan, wrote in 1935,

despite the fact that most Negro publication have remained cool and restrained and sensible on the results on the Louis-Carnera fight, thus belying their racial label of 'emotional,' the editor of *The Crisis* pleads guilty to being fairly racial in his reactions to this matter. Louis does thrill us. We are proud of him. We did go into something like ecstasy when he won. But we do not advise our race to hitch its wagon to a boxer, or base its judgments of achievements on the size of a man's biceps or the speed and power of his left hook. We don't think, however, that the feat of Louis ought to be minimized and we don't think it fair or accurate to state that his success as an individual will have no effect on the fortunes of the rest of his race.<sup>9</sup>

In this opening salvo to his editorial, Du Bois appeared to be presenting a conflicting message. As a race man, he was proud of Louis, but as a black intellectual, he had hoped that access to

---

<sup>8</sup> Owens was elected captain in June 1935 for the 1936 Buckeye track team.

<sup>9</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Joe Louis and Jesse Owens," *Crisis*, 42 (Aug. 1935), 241.

civil and social rights would be obtained through education and the arts movement. Yet, it was clear, at least in this editorial, that Du Bois was a realist. He realized that black athletes had more cultural reach and social capital than any black intellectual or artist. Du Bois continued:

Those who maintain that a Negro historian or editor or philosopher or scientist or composer or singer or poet or painter is more important than a great athlete are on sound ground, but they would be foolish to maintain that these worthy individuals have more power or influence than the athletes. After all, it is not the infinitesimal intellectual America which needs conversion on the race problem; it is the rank and file, the ones who never read a book by DuBois, or heard a lecture by James Weldon Johnson, or scanned a poem of Countee Cullen, or heard a song by Marian Anderson or waded through a scholarly treatise by...Carter Woodson...or Benjamin Brawley. For these millions, who hold the solution of the race problem in their hands, the beautiful breasting of a tape by Jesse Owens and the thud of a glove on the hand of Joe Louis carry more 'interracial education' than all the erudite philosophy ever written on race.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the individuals who were reading this editorial in 1935 had heard of Du Bois, and quite possibly Cullen, Woodson, and Anderson. It seems that Du Bois was trying to rally his audience—individuals who considered themselves members of an elite social class and frowned upon Owen's and Louis's athletic achievements discounting them as having no importance, or, at the very least, no political significance. He was asking them to reexamine what role black athletes could have in dismantling the race problem, a problem that the New Negro movement and other strategies toward racial equality seemed to have failed at solving.

This strategy that Du Bois was evoking is what scholars David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller call "muscular assimilation." This term, according to Wiggins and Miller, encapsulated the strategies used by racial reformers who believed that "if 'sportsmanship' and 'fair play' could be achieved in national pastimes, then ideally such notions could be extended to all walks of life." The black press, as well as individual race activists, "thoroughly covered sporting accomplishments and adopted a stance that would soon become the policy of the most prominent

---

<sup>10</sup> Du Bois, "Joe Louis and Jesse Owens," 241.

black advocates of uplift and activism.” Furthermore “such programs for racial reform were devised to bring about the demise of Jim Crow, and African American commentators on sport were exceedingly articulate about the ways they hoped to use the playing field for social mobility and to enlist athletic triumphs in the quest for equal opportunity.” Wiggins asserted that for race activists, “the relationship between sport and society remain[ed] enormously significant.”<sup>11</sup> The black press, acting as race activist, “wrote” muscular assimilation, as a discursive and uplift strategy, in the mid-1930s. Muscular assimilation served not only as a means for racial inclusion, but also as a tool to craft Owens’s and Louis’s masculinity. Owens’s athletic triumphs in 1935 and Louis’s pugilist accomplishments in the 1930s and in the 1940s—as well as his commitment to the armed services—represented significant moments in history in which “ruptures” existed and the black press recognized that the sporting accomplishments of these men also offered opportunities to champion black manhood.

How, then, did the black press use Owens and Louis as vehicles for social mobility and as models for respectable black masculinity? As this chapter demonstrates, black journalists and race leaders were highly invested in the representation of these athletes with the hope that their accomplishments in sport and society would lead to racial fairness for all African Americans. By constructing them as ideal black men, journalists hoped that blacks would emulate the type of respectability these men publicly modeled. However, in the long run, even Owens and Louis could not live up to the constructions that the press had designed for them.

## **Ambassadors of Race: Louis and Owens as Model Men**

---

<sup>11</sup> David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Uneven Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Urbana, 2003), 2–3. See also, Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins, eds., *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 2004).

What may have prompted Du Bois to write his editorial was a June 8, 1935, *Pittsburgh Courier* editorial titled “Owens and Louis, Our Ambassadors.” This piece made the connection between sport and society, and the roles Louis and Owens could play in dismantling the racial barrier. Having written that “perhaps in no other way, except on the athletic field, could the name of a single Negro travel the circuit of general knowledge so rapidly,” the author underscored that the obvious reason was that “Jesse Owens is on top.” With that simple statement, the editorialist acknowledged the power and political currency embedded in such celebrity, excellence, and competitiveness. Stressing the lay origins of Owens, in particular, the editorialist reminded readers that “in the athletic circles of this country the name of Jesse Owens is as familiar as the name of the President of the United States. As yet, Jesse Owens is not a college president, nor a bank president, nor an editor, nor a professional, nor is he a capitalist. Jesse Owens is an athlete.”<sup>12</sup> The pronouncement of Owens as an athlete signaled that it is was through his physicality, and not the arts movement or intellectualism, that he achieved manly recognition.

The black athlete, according to Ben Carrington, was “created” in Sydney, Australia on December 26, 1908. It was on this day that Jack Johnson defeated the Canadian Tommy Burns and became the heavyweight champion of the world. As Carrington states, the idea of the black athlete and what he “signifies has shifted and oscillated over the years: submissive and threatening, often obedient, occasionally rebellious, revolting and in revolt, political and compromised, a commodity and commodified,” and, I would argue, a fear and a fantasy.<sup>13</sup>

Equally vacuous and paradoxical is the concept of sport, whose “assumed innocence as a space

---

<sup>12</sup> “Owens and Louis, Our Ambassadors,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1935, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora* (London, 2010), 2. See, also, Jeffrey T. Sammon, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing* (Urbana, 1988), 46. Sammons argues that “Jack Johnson foreshadowed, and in some ways helped to create, the ‘New Negro’—a more militant black who was disillusioned with southern segregation, northern de facto discrimination, and the undelivered promises of the American Creed.”

(in the imagination) and a place (as it physically manifests itself) ... is removed from everyday concerns of power, inequality, struggle and ideology,” and politics, yet, highlights and reinforces these concepts.<sup>14</sup> As an imagined space, sport, ideologically, embodied the major tenets regarding hegemonic masculinity: patriarchy, courage, competitiveness, democracy, domination, liberalism, and fair play. For African Americans, sport—both real and imagined—was the arena in which ideas on freedom, equality, race, liberalism, and citizenship were shaped and contested. Carrington points out that sports historically “provided an opportunity for blacks throughout the African diaspora to gain recognition through physical struggle.” Further, the presumed transparent rules of sports, and its democratic principle that the best man wins, allowed for social advancement and public recognition of black manhood that were not always available in other professional arenas.

The editorialist for “Our Ambassador,” who used gendered language to stress Owens’s ascendancy, wrote that Owens

has outstripped all contenders and in doing this, he has complied with all the rules of the game. He has mastered four events, and no one can deny him his achievement nor does anyone attempt to deny him his honor. Jesse Owens and Joe Louis are our ambassadors. We are fortunate that they have come to the top. We are more fortunate that they are gentleman, with all the honors bestowed and with all the possibilities that yet lie before them.<sup>15</sup>

As ambassadors of the race, the athletic accomplishments of Louis and Owens served as a source of racial pride, despite the fact that their athletic abilities were not representative of all black men. It was their character, or the demonstration of gentlemanly behavior, as this editorialist stressed, is what garnered them access to some of the privileges and respect given to their white counterparts. As ambassadors of the race, or, more specifically, black men, Louis and Owens

---

<sup>14</sup> Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> “Owens and Louis, Our Ambassadors,” 12.

were bestowed with the same characteristics of the men they represented on the public stage.

Attempting to make this connection, the editorialist correlated the success that Louis and Owens enjoyed within their respective fields with the endeavors of all African American men:

Just as these two men have excelled by complying with the rules and regulations that cannot be violated if athletes are to win, just so other men can come to the top by strict application to the rules of governing whatever game they elect to play. As a group of people, we can take a great lesson from the achievements of these two young men. Just as they have won in their respective fields, so others may win in other chosen fields. Forget color and race and think more of the rules of the game and their rigid requirements. Human endeavor is not confined to the athletic field. What men have done, other men may do. More power to our ambassadors. They are spreading good will while they achieve.<sup>16</sup>

Louis and Owens “excelled” because they complied with the “rules and regulations” of the game. Moreover, the piece intimated that if African Americans were to excel or progress socially, economically, and politically within American society, they, too, needed to follow the rules of the game. Although the black press was not always direct in articulating what “rules” blacks needed to follow in order to achieve racial fairness, through Louis and Owens the press projected idealized virtues and values that every good black man of respectability should embody. And, it was these character traits, in particular, that race agents hoped white society would recognize in the most worthy of black citizens. Fairness, virtue, hard work, determination, and sportsmanship became the democratic principles that all men potentially had access to. Owens and Louis were not just racial ambassadors speaking for, or on behalf of, black men; they became, as this piece articulates, representative men, personifying the level of success black men could attain if given a chance.

Du Bois’s editorial credited Louis and Owens as having “aided materially in altering the usual appraisal of Negroes by the rank and file of the American public.” He asserted that “if

---

<sup>16</sup> “Owens and Louis, Our Ambassadors,” 12.

these two mere boys have done nothing more than just awaken curiosity of Negroes in millions of white minds, they have served the race well.”<sup>17</sup> The black press recognized the social and political currency Owens and Louis possessed in altering the “usual appraisal” of African American men both nationally and internationally in their demonstration of respectable black male citizenship. The article, “The International Value of Joe Louis,” written for the Associated Negro Press (ANP) and picked up by the *New York Amsterdam News*, suggested that the fame and importance of Louis, as a racial ambassador, extended outside of the United States. Pickens viewed Louis’s international celebrity as “an influence for good” on the public stage for all African American men. Comparing Louis’s behavior with that of his white opponents, Pickens noted that Louis “does not boast either before nor after he has done the job. When he and [King] Levinsky were introduced to the fans. . . Levinsky jumped up like a crowing cock, shaking hands with himself and really congratulating himself before the fight. . . [Joe] cut no monkeyshininess, and really looked bashful as he merely rose, to obey the rule.”<sup>18</sup> The international value of Louis, as Pickens and other race activists asserted, was that he demonstratively contested the racial stereotypes tagged onto black manhood. Louis’s public display of character was “just the opposite to all ‘public opinion’ about Negroes. . . the Negro is supposed to lose his head, especially over ‘success’ of any sort, and by all means to be showy and clownish all the time.” But, as Pickens illustrated in his article, it was white manhood that was performatively suspect of citizenship and should be publicly ridiculed. Pickens concluded that “the good sense of this boy is of greater influence for good than is his skill as a fighter and his mighty power as a human machine.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Du Bois, “Joe Louis and Jesse Owens,” 241.

<sup>18</sup> Wm. Pickens, “The International Value of Joe Louis,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 24, 1935, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Pickens, “The International Value of Joe Louis,” 12.



It is of interest to note that Pickens, similar to most race agents who viewed the success of Lewis and Owens as representative of the success attainable by all African American men if given the opportunity, did not overly emphasize Louis's rare skill as a boxer or athlete. Instead, Pickens framed boxing as Louis's job, and by doing so, Louis was not an extraordinary man with exceptional behavior for a black man, but an ordinary laborer demonstrating normative characteristics of all black men.

Louis was often reminded by both blacks and whites of his moral and civic responsibility *for* the race by upholding the standards of black masculinity on the public stage. Governor Frank D. Fitzgerald, of Louis's adopted home state of Michigan, wrote a letter to Louis on the eve of his fight with Carnera. In the letter, printed in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Gov. Fitzgerald, talking to Louis "as a man," offered Louis advice. Fitzgerald, who had "seen a lot of men shoot to the top, only to squander the opportunities they found waiting for them there," suggested that these men did not have the character to recognize "their good fortune meant little to them or to anyone else, because they acquired the false notion that it was intended for their own personal benefit, and not for others." Although the Governor could have been eliciting the memory of any number of men, for the readers of the *Courier*, more than likely, the Governor was conjuring the memory of Jack Johnson. Striking a moral chord, Fitzgerald continued that "the longer I live, the stronger becomes my beliefs that there is no such thing as purely personal success. To be successful, in the true meaning of the word, is to be so good in some certain class, that your superior qualities redound to the benefit of others."<sup>20</sup> Louis's success as a boxer, the Governor stated, was based on ability to "overpower others by skill and physical force," and these qualities would provide Louis "world prominence, and money." But money and fame, the Governor cautioned, "will mean little

---

<sup>20</sup> Frank D. Fitzgerald, "Michigan's Governor Pens 'Literary Classic' To Joe on Eve of Big Battle," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 29, 1935, A5.

. . . if [Louis does] not use them as God intended.” Seemingly seeking to inculcate Louis with not only his moral duty, but also his Christian duty to follow the dictates of *to whom much is given*, Fitzgerald informed the boxer that as “representative-at-large of your people,” it was his responsibility to represent the race, which, “at times in the past, has been misrepresented by others who thought they had reached the heights. . . [and] have been denied equal opportunity.” It was Louis’s duty to demonstrate to the world that the qualities he possessed—skill and physicality—which, consequently, had allowed for him to become an exceptional boxer, were the same qualities that “can also be found in others of [his] race, and used for their own welfare, and the welfare of humanity at large.”<sup>21</sup> Fitzgerald’s letter demonstrated that Louis’s public display of black masculinity had moral consequences for African Americans. Yet, as Fitzgerald stated, Louis modeling of masculinity also had national and international consequences reflecting an American exceptionalism of skill and superiority. Concluding his letter with “Michigan will be proud of you,” Fitzgerald situated Louis as a rightful citizen not only of his adopted northern state but also of the United States.

It was through sport and the black athlete that black social critics and commentators saw the possibilities of political, economic, and social freedoms, or at the very least, the contestation for the lack of these freedoms. “Sport,” according to Carrington, “during the first half of the twentieth century, is an increasingly powerful, and perhaps the most powerful, form of *racial spectacle*. . . [S]port becomes the modality through which popular racism is lived, embodied and challenged.”<sup>22</sup> Each time Owens and Louis stepped into their respective fields to compete against a white opponent, they demonstrated racial equality; when they defeated a white adversary, they challenged the fiction of white racial supremacy. It was through their modeling of respectable

---

<sup>21</sup> Fitzgerald, “Michigan’s Governor Pens,” A5.

<sup>22</sup> Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics*, 72. Emphasis in original.

black masculinity that they debunked the fiction that African Americans were not deserving of the same citizenship rights as their white brethren.

The legacy of Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight boxing champ, and his demonstration of black manhood was something that continued to haunt race agents in the 1930s. Jack Johnson lost his heavyweight title in 1915, and boxing officials were adamant that there would never be another black heavyweight champion. The black press remained somewhat loyal to Johnson, but his refusal—while he was the heavyweight champion—to stop associating with white women, along with taunting his opponents, marked him as a poor sportsman and as an example of what could happen if a black man achieved too much power in the realm of sports. Furthermore, his assessment and negative criticism of Louis, which was often reported in the white press, continued to mar Johnson's reputation among blacks. To counter this legacy, Louis's handlers and even the black press aided in the construction of Louis's public persona.

There was a set of rules that Louis had to follow that his handlers hoped would distance him from Johnson and articulate a different type of black manhood. Although some of the rules applied to Louis's behavior inside the ring, such as no fixed fights or gloating after beating an opponent, most of the codes of conduct regulated his behavior outside the ring. When being photographed, Louis was to show little emotion; he was to never enter a nightclub alone; fast cars, specifically red ones, were off limits; and, of course, the most important rule was that he was to never fraternize in public with white women or be photographed with one. It was Louis's adherence to these codes and the protection of the black press from publishing his indiscretions that helped construct him as a non-threatening but yet modern black man that allowed for his acceptance within the white press.

The white press also reported on Louis's behavior, often contending that he and Owens were a credit to their race. Black newspapers took note of any such reportage and occasionally provided reprints in their own respective organs with additional commentary. The *Atlanta Daily World* reprinted an article from the Associated Negro Press wire (ANP). The article, which originally was published in the *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, praised the twenty-one-year-old boxer's modesty and accomplishments, and noted how he was idolized by blacks and admired by some whites for his boxing skills. Although the original title of the article was "The Case of Joe Louis," the *Daily World* reprinted the article in its entirety under the title, "Bomber Cited As Good Will For The Race In All Lands," hence stressing "the position Louis occupies as a young citizen of the United States."<sup>23</sup>

The article, in some ways, did situate Louis as a model citizen who embodied the myth and symbolism of American exceptionalism. Locating him within the meta-narrative of the self-made man, the article begins with "in the history of the world few boys of 21 have had the opportunity to express themselves as social factors. . . . [A] year ago today he was an automobile mechanic in Detroit. Today, throughout the civilized world. . . possible world-champion."<sup>24</sup> The myth of the self-made man, according to Martin Summers, is "a product of the market revolution and the emergence of liberalism in the early nineteenth century, the ideal of the self-made man articulated a formula for success that was dependent upon the cultivation of one's character."<sup>25</sup> Rooted in Victorian sensibilities, "character included honesty, piety, self-control, and a commitment to the producer values of industry, thrift, punctuality, and sobriety." And, as Summers further posits, character "was most often invoked as an indispensable quality when

---

<sup>23</sup> "Bomber Cited as Good Will for the Race in all Lands," *Atlanta Daily World*, Aug. 19, 1935, 5.

<sup>24</sup> "Bomber Cited as Good Will," 5.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900–1930* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 1.

considering the public lives of individuals, specifically the individual's relationship to, and interactions in, the marketplace. The idea that one's character was crucial to one's success was axiomatic in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century."<sup>26</sup> Although the myth of the self-made man is intrinsically bound with the ideals of an individual's character, upward mobility and the marketplace were not always part and parcel of what constituted being self-made. James V. Catano argued that there are several "strands" of this myth that all revolve around individual responsibility. The first strand was based on the "conservative protestant ethic," and allowed for "a weak sense of social mobility."<sup>27</sup> The remaining two strands consisted of "the formation of individual and social virtue first defined by Franklin and Jefferson and later embodied in the Emersonian dictates of self-reliance . . . [and] the popular definition of the self-made entrepreneur, often broadly and somewhat incorrectly described as the Horatio Alger myth." According to Catano, these concepts are what "dominate the popular versions we know today."<sup>28</sup> As Catano and Summers imply, character is always a property of the public sphere.

The shift in U.S. economy from producer-based to consumer-based along with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment caused a shift in what it meant to be a self-made man, as well as destabilized those properties associated with hegemonic masculinity. According to Summers, there was a conflation of "economic success and character," and this fusion extended to citizenship.<sup>29</sup> For those African American men who were members of the submerged tenth, whose access to the marketplace was limited and whose disenfranchisement was still legally and violently sanctioned, linking black masculinity to virtue, the body, and physicality helped

---

<sup>26</sup> Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> James V. Catano, "The Rhetoric of Masculinity: Origins, Institutions, and the Myth of the Self-Mad Man," *College English*, 52(April 1990), 423.

<sup>28</sup> Catano, "The Rhetoric of Masculinity," 423.

<sup>29</sup> Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 2.

redefine gendered spaces and traits, and allowed for a remapping of what it meant to be self-made—thus allowing for African American men to stake claims to their citizenship rights.

This remapping of masculinity extended beyond the ephemeral into the physical. Seeming to conjure up the mythical characters created by Horatio Alger, Jr., white and black presses, when addressing their ascendancy in their given fields, would focus on the athletes’ “rags-to-riches” stories, noting how both hailed from impoverished surroundings and attained middle-class respectability through hard work. Louis and Owens, similar to the mythic characters created by Alger, had to escape the failings of their fathers, and surpass him not only in virtue, but also in success with the help of a benefactor or mentor who recognized the male’s exceptional qualities.

Joseph Louis Barrow was born on May 13, 1914 in a town close to Lafayette, Alabama. Louis’s parents, Lillian and Monroe “Mun” Barrows, were poor sharecroppers who barely were able to feed their eight children. In 1916, Mun Barrows was committed to Searcy State Hospital for the Colored Insane. Shortly thereafter, Lillie Barrows was told that her husband had died.<sup>30</sup> She later would remarry another widower, Pat Brooks, who also had eight children. In 1926, the Brooks moved their brood north to Detroit. The young Barrow was reportedly big for his age, and this accident of nature was complicated by the fact that once he entered the Detroit school system, he was placed with children much younger because it was believed that the educational standards in Alabama were not on par with those in Michigan. Embarrassed and insecure in his new school environment, Louis developed a stammer and would eventually shy away from school. When he was in the sixth grade, his teacher suggested that he attend a vocational school, believing his only chance of making a living would be with his hands.

---

<sup>30</sup> Actually, Monroe Barrows was not dead. He would resurface twenty years later.

Lillie Barrow Brooks wanted to also instill some culture into her son. Although poor, she scraped together money so that Louis could take violin lessons. The violin was soon replaced by boxing. When the Depression hit, Louis dropped out of school to work. He scaled back his training at the gym in order to contribute to his family's less-than-adequate income. By this time, he had already fought and won a few amateur bouts and demonstrated some promise as a boxer. However, it was the Briggs Motor Company, and later the Ford Motor Company, that paid the bills, but he missed boxing. Encouraged by his mother, Louis quit Ford and fought on the amateur circuit and used his winnings to buy his family groceries.<sup>31</sup> Louis fought fifty-four amateur fights and won fifty. He soon tried his luck in the Golden Glove competition, winning the 1934 competition in Detroit. Louis's exhibition fighting got him noticed by John Roxborough, a black Detroit real estate developer who actually earned his money by running numbers. By the end of 1934, Roxborough and Julian Black, a Chicago numbers runner and now co-manager of Louis, moved Louis to Chicago to begin training as a professional fighter. The two men assumed the roles of Louis's mentor and surrogate father.

James Cleveland Owens, born on September 12, 1913, in Oakville, Alabama, to Henry and Emma Owens, was also the son of sharecroppers. Young Owens was the last of 13 pregnancies in which only ten offspring survived. As a child, Owens suffered from poor health. His "chronic bronchial congestion, aggravated by a poor diet and inadequate heat in the winter, resulted in several bouts with 'powerful bad fever,' pneumonia." In addition to the pneumonia, as a child, Owens had a "mysterious growth on his chest and legs that had to be crudely and painfully removed with a knife by his mother's hand," and he had his fair share of potentially debilitating accidents. According to his biographer, William Baker, Owens accidentally "stepped

---

<sup>31</sup> Chris Mead, *Champion: Joe Louis, Black Hero in White America* (New York, 1985), 8.

in a steel hunting trap prepared by his father. . . [and] he barely escaped serious when he was run over by a cotton drag.”<sup>32</sup>

The Owens moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1920s. Once acclimated to their new environment, Emma Owens and many of the Owens children did well. Young James Cleveland, who was called “J. C.” by family members and became “Jesse” when an elementary school teacher misheard his name, was a mannerly yet timid child. Similar to Louis, J. C. also worked to support the family. Again, according to Baker, “shortly after arriving in Cleveland, Jesse . . . got himself a job in a shoe repair shop, sweeping floors, washing windows, cleaning machinery, and shining shoes in the evenings and on weekends.” The validity of the story is unknown since the young Owens would have been ten years old at the time; however, the story serves to underscore Owens status as a self-made man. Henry Owens, who Baker characterized as “weak,” did not adjust well to the urban North. In 1929, right at the time of the economic crash, the elder Owens “stepped off a curb into the path of an onrushing taxi.” He was believed to have suffered only a broken leg, which meant being laid off of his steel mill job. A follow-up examination revealed that he was blind in one eye. As a result, Owens was unable to find suitable employment—without the aid of his son. Similar to Louis, who gravitated to successful and self-possessed men, Owens also found a mentor in his track coach, Charles Riley, a white man “who made all the difference in [Owens’s] life.”<sup>33</sup>

In retelling their stories, the press stressed how Louis and Owens had to leave “home” in order to acquire success. Home, in this instance, was the South. The black press, especially, stressed the importance of leaving the South in order to achieve manhood, and that both Louis and Owens were able to have the opportunity to be great athletes once they left Alabama.

---

<sup>32</sup> William J. Baker, *Jesse Owens: An American Life* (New York, 1986), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 21.



Finally, in the last act of remaking, both presses stressed that both athletes changed their names—Louis, from Joseph Louis Barrows, and Owens, from James Cleveland Owens.

As an exemplar of American values, it was important that Louis maintained and continued to exemplify the codes and conduct of American manhood. Although journalists had no illusion that one day Louis might lose a major heavyweight fight, and even cautioned readers of this eventuality, they were more concerned that he would not uphold the cultural standards set in place regarding masculinity, especially black masculinity. As the reprint “Bomber Cited As Good Will” illustrates, white journalists were also concerned with how Louis performed respectable black masculinity:

whether or not [Louis] ever attains that goal[of world champion], he has impressed himself upon the imagination of millions as an example of clean living and UNEMOTIONAL behavior. Neither Halle Selassie, nor any other of the black ancient rulers of the Rome that now menace him, ever had such a following of loyal friends and well-wishers as the bronze Apollo. If he can hold the poise, restraint and decency of personal conduct that he has shown thus far in his brief career he may do as much for his race as the great Booker T. Washington accomplished. While he is the idol he will be imitated. If he slips from the picture of a Bible-reading, fiddle-playing mother’s boy, he will be followed. Joe Louis has the respect of millions of men and women today. May he hold it.<sup>34</sup>

The journalist from the *Daily World* concluded the reprint with an additional comment, adding, “Along with the white editor of the Herald-Examiner, Joe’s brethren in blood are also praying, ‘May he hold it.’” The *Atlanta Daily World* viewed the *Herald-Examiner’s* article as a positive piece in which the white press recognized the good character of Louis. The *Daily World* writer believed that through Louis “white Americans see a type of Negro they did not suspect existed. We know that there are many like him. But Joe has got a chance to show.” Careful to stress and even alter the font size from the original article, the *Daily World* wanted to impress upon their readers the behavioral

---

<sup>34</sup> “Bomber Cited as Good Will,” 5.

characteristics that they believed were harmful to the race. Again, it would be because of Louis's character and through his performance of respectable black masculinity that blacks would be viewed as assimilable and, thus, acquire equal citizenship.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, while the *Daily World* viewed the *Herald-Examiner's* article as hope toward progress, Lucius Harper of the *Chicago Defender* viewed it as a threat and proscription to African American masculinity. In his feature, "The Way of Things...", Harper, under the subtitle, "Be Careful Joe," was also intrigued by the number of articles the dailies were dedicating to Louis, especially those written by journalists who were not sportswriters. In his column, Harper provided excerpts of the article, as well as analysis of the discourse used. Harper wrote that

the writers of these editorials are expecting Joe Louis and those close to him as advisors to read between the lines and think on these words: behavior, restraint, decency, personal conduct and respect. Northern editors have some respect for the feelings of the readers, and are cunning at word study. You can sum up all the editorials in one paragraph and relieve them of this skinning-the-cat process. What these editors would like to say is: "Joe, we will pay whatever you demand to see you in fistic combat with white men; we will even applaud your victory, but we will not tolerate you making love to blonde girls."<sup>36</sup>

Seemingly taking a jab at the southern-based *Atlanta Daily World's* editorialist who printed the entire article and could not discern the veiled caveats embedded within, Harper did not view the *Herald-Examiner's* editorial as embracing Louis's manhood and, hence, citizenship. Indeed, he viewed the editorial as dictating a proscriptive citizenship whereby Louis, and by extension all African American men, would have access to some entitlements but not all. But Harper was not too pressed by this limitation, writing that to "really tell the naked truth about the matter, Joe's

---

<sup>35</sup> "Bomber Cited as Good Will," 5.

<sup>36</sup> Lucius C. Harper, "The Way of Things. . . : Be Careful Joe," *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 17, 1935, 5.

own race isn't so liberal on that question," meaning, African Americans preferred he avoid white women, too.<sup>37</sup>

Owens public persona also seemed to be well crafted. Contrary to Louis, Owens was often photographed smiling for the cameras, and he did appear, in at least one photograph, with a white woman. However, in the photo there is a noticeably "safe" distance between Owens and the woman, with a white man standing in between, mediating any suggestion of impropriety. The reason for the photo seems to be collegiate, and as representative man and racial ambassador, it was important for Owens to demonstrate that black men could have collegial relationships with whites and challenge the "usual appraisal" that the black male's main pursuit—academic or otherwise—was the conquest of white womanhood. Indeed, from his elementary school teachers in Cleveland, Ohio, and his first track coach and surrogate father, Charles Riley, to his college track-and-field coach Larry Snyder, it was impressed upon Owens that he had a responsibility to "model proper behavior, wholesome attitudes, and good interracial relations." By the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Owens was well aware of his obligation and how he needed to be an exemplar of his race.<sup>38</sup>

White sportswriters took note of Owens's demeanor, a quality that made him acceptable, if not tolerable, and exceptional to the white press and masses. As Charles Fountain noted, Owens's "accommodating nature . . . allowed him to be accepted, by his teammates, by the press, by white America. In a competition staged to showcase a society built upon racism, Jesse Owens'[s] inspiring gifts as an athlete, and his humble yet noble bearing as a man, prompted white America to confront their shame."<sup>39</sup> Fountain was, quite possibly, overreaching in his

---

<sup>37</sup> Harper, "The Way of Things," 5.

<sup>38</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 54–55.

<sup>39</sup> Pamela C. Laucella, "An Analysis of Mainstream, Black, and Communist Press Coverage of Jesse Owens in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games" (Ph.D diss, University of North Carolina, 2004), 56.

assumption that Owens's humbleness had any moral impact on white America. Indeed, Owens's demeanor could have possibly reinforced stereotypes that progressive-minded blacks were hoping to avoid. Still, as Pamela Laucella notes, the press coverage, especially the white press coverage of Owens, was preoccupied with his seemingly non-threatening behavior. Richard Mandell, Laucella documents, saw Owens "'as a superior individual who was a self-effacing gentleman . . . and both a paragon and a refutation' and 'a credit to his race.'"<sup>40</sup>

The black press attempted to counter the negative depictions that the white press used to characterize Louis and Owens. Although Louis was a hero to both black and white Americans, the white press could not resist capitalizing on his otherness. As David Margolick has written, the white press was notorious in their portrayal of Louis as "a kind of King Kong—an exotic creature, temporarily domesticated" or as an illiterate black man, often quoting Louis in dialect.<sup>41</sup> In "Boxing's Sambo Twins: Racial Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908 to 1938," William H. Wiggins, Jr. noted that the Sambo depiction of Louis appeared regularly on the front pages, editorial pages, and sports pages of the nation's daily newspapers.<sup>42</sup> Even the monikers that the white press chose to use to describe the exceptionality of these athletes seemed to connect them to a primitive past.

In "Sports of the *Times*," a seemingly satirical *New York Times* article, John Kieran used monikers that conjured the stereotype of the lazy black male slave. Describing the scene at Louis training camp in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, Kieran suggested, tongue-in-cheek—maybe—that "Even when Joe Louis is asleep—which he seems to be most of the time—the general staff moves busily around the Dr. Biers training camp here. This is probably the most extensive and

---

<sup>40</sup> Laucella, "An Analysis," 57.

<sup>41</sup> David Margolick, *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink* (New York, 2005), 87.

<sup>42</sup> William H. Wiggins Jr., "Boxing's Sambo Twins: Racial Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908 to 1938," *Journal of Sports History* (Winter, 1988), 242–254.

impressive general camp. Even [Jack] Dempsey and [Gene] Tunney lacked the pomp of Pompton and the big show with Shufflin' Joe."<sup>43</sup> Although the "shufflin" could be used to describe Louis's footwork, "Shufflin' Joe" was not the moniker used in the black press to describe Louis's exceptionality. "Shufflin'," a term, when associated with black masculinity, conjures images of the "old-Negro" or an "Uncle Tom." These stereotypes or representations were the antithesis of the modern manhood that Louis modeled. The black press avoided aliases that evoked a black manhood that many blacks in the urban north wanted to distance themselves from. To counter the association of a primitive and a subservient past, the black press would enlist such names as the "Brown Bomber" and the "Detroit Destroyer" to describe Louis; and Owens was sometimes called the "Cleveland Express," or the "Buckeye Bullet." These monikers given to Owens and Louis by the black press were not just simple exercises in alliteration; they served to distance them from the primitive and their southern homeland and locate them in a more progressive, modern, industrial north where they rose to the status of men.

### **Raced Ambassadors: Louis and Owens As Representative Men**

The athletic achievements of Louis and Owens in 1935 provided some hope that their self-representation and personal conduct were representative of all African Americans. The national and international success of these two men allowed for a stage for black male representation. The black press was very much aware that by constructing these two men as model race men, their success as black men would translate to others. In a sense, Louis and Owens engaged in their own "Double-V" campaign prior to World War II. Their appearance on the international stage as

---

<sup>43</sup> John Kiernan, "Sports of the Times," *New York Times*, June 20, 1935, 26.

superior American athletes and respectable African American men, many hoped, would put to rest the “race problem” within the United States.

Again returning to “Owens and Louis, Our Ambassadors,” the writer clearly viewed Louis and Owens as representing black America. The author, similar to many black journalists who wrote about Louis and Owens, seemed to tow-the-line between citizenship and race and representative and exceptional in his assessment of the masculinity of Louis and Owens. As citizens, the biology of race “has nothing to do with physical prowess nor mental capacity” of Owens and Louis, but instead “it is all a question of the man himself.” Arguing that Louis’s success was based on his ability to “co-ordinate mind and muscle. . . [and]. . . because he is endowed with physical stamina, strength and agility of body, and nothing else,” the editorialist attributed Louis’s success to his manhood and not to any essentializing qualities associated with race. Thus, Louis and Owens served as a bridge—ambassadors—where similarities of manhood were stressed and difference, such as race, were effaced.

Subsequently, it became somewhat of a double-speak when the editorialist held that Louis and Owens “are our ambassadors. We are fortunate that they have come to the top. We are more fortunate that they are gentlemen, with all of the honors bestowed and with all the possibilities that yet lie before them.” Hence, as ambassadors or representative men, the exceptional skills of Louis and Owens as athletes were not transferable to all black men. However, their codes of conduct, or gentlemanly behavior, as well as their self-determination, could be modeled, which, in turn allowed for all black men to have their black masculinity validated in ways similar to Louis and Owens.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> “Our Ambassadors,” 12.

As stated, the public personas of Owens and Louis served dual purposes. They allowed for them to be racial ambassadors, demonstrating how access and opportunity for black men did equate to model citizenship, and they modeled what was deemed respectable black masculinity to African Americans in hopes that black men would follow suit. In “Joe Louis A Good Example,” the editorialist discussed how Louis was a model for respectable black comportment internationally and a role model for black men within the United States. Stating that “in the midst of his sudden popularity, ornamented by financial splendor, unlike many who have gone before him [Louis] has been able to maintain a soberness of action, calmness of expression and quietness of manner that have commanded the respect and most favorable comment of the public.”<sup>45</sup> Again, it was not Louis’s pugilist success that the editorialist highlighted, but the negative stereotypes of black masculinity he helped debunk, that was most admired. Clearly making reference to former boxing champion Jack Johnson, who, publicly, was not the great racial ambassador blacks had hoped for, Louis, instead, publicly modeled a black masculinity that was not extravagant but conformative to a progressive, modern masculinity. Louis’s conduct, both “private and public,” is what “has afforded subject matter for newspaper writers and columnists even beyond the boundary line of his own country.” It was Louis’s demonstration of a non-aberrant black masculinity—one that if infused with success and power and virility, would not become even more deviant and primitive and nonconformist—that would demonstrate that African Americans were capable of the conformity and uniformity of citizenship. And, as a spokesperson for African Americans on the world stage, Louis was symbolic of this.

Louis, performing and symbolizing the hegemonic ideals of masculinity, became the vessel and the promise that the United States would accept (if not embrace) black male

---

<sup>45</sup> “Joe Louis A Good Example,” *Chicago Defender*, July 13, 1935, 16.

citizenship and African American civic belonging. The crafting of Louis's respectability suggested an allusion that his brand of masculinity was accessible to African American men. According to the editorialist, Louis "points the way through the method of proper living not only to other young fighters of all races but especially to non-fighters of his own race who could find no finer model than this sober young lad." As ambassador of race—or representative man—Louis became the race's son. This young lad, who was not frivolousness or egomaniacal, "brings home the lesson to everyone that steadiness of character and quietness of manner are more attractive to well-thinking people than vulgar display in utterance and mannerism." This notion of "bringing home" intimates the race as a family, and Louis, as son who left home to seek his fortune returns to his family not with money but with something more valuable: the tools of citizenship.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, again, there is a tension between race and nation. When the writer speaks of "home," he is not talking of the United States, per se, nor the South, nor Chicago, but instead, a familial, raced community. Louis was the son who "done good." Everyone can be proud, but only a few can benefit from the success of a family member. Speaking as a proud member of the inner circle, journalist William "Bill" Nunn wrote after Louis's victory over Carnera that "to those of us who know him well, we know that Joe is the answer to our prayers. . . the prayers of a race of people who are struggling to break through a dense cloud of prejudice and studied misunderstanding. . . a race of people who ask nothing more than a CHANCE . . a race of people, who though bowed by oppression, will never be broken in spirit."<sup>47</sup> Similar to all great biblical and mythological leaders who were conduits of hope and who helped usher their

---

<sup>46</sup> "Joe Louis A Good Example," 13.

<sup>47</sup> William G. Nunn, "'Bill' Nunn Writes His Story 10,000 Feet in the Air," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 29, 1935, 1.



followers from a burdensome past into a land of promise, Louis provided access to a better future where the race would be free of dragons, persecution, and Pharisees.

Yet, it was not simply a break from the past, relief from wandering in the wilderness, or helping his followers cross over into the promised utopia that Louis offered his followers. He was also viewed as a Midas, someone who could also be a conduit to prosperity. Although not directly stating it, Nunn's *Courier* article suggested that because of Louis, prosperity would rain on African Americans. The layout of the article suggests that the tide was turning and that African Americans were being ushered into modernity. The article, "'Bill' Nunn Writes His Story 10,000 Feet In The Air: 'I FEEL THAT THE RACE'S PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED'; Special Plane Wings Through Night and Thus Makes Glorious History for Negro Journalism," focused not on the Carnera-Louis fight, but instead on the historic moment when Nunn, the editor of the *Courier*, was able to take a "special" plane from New York to Pittsburgh in order to get his story to press, thus beating other black weeklies. Again, as ambassador of the race, Louis's success was a symbolic rabbit's foot, by which the race would prosper as well.

In a sense, Louis's physical body, his working body, his muscular body, and his body as a racialized, sport spectacle, became a commodified body that linked prosperity and citizenship. Louis, his handlers, and promoters earned money off of Louis's laboring body, but so did Harlem and Chicago. Prior to Louis's ascendancy in the sporting ring, businesses were losing money during the depression. However, sports allowed for people to flock to that area and spend their money. In his article "Harlem Café Sorry Joe Louis Is Gone," journalist David Kane wrote that "business perked up during the week preceding the fight about 20 per cent in most places; some reported even greater increases. Since the departure of the fight fans, business has more or less remained at a good level, and the night club impressarios [sic] are given to the belief that Joe

Louis served as a good ambassador for Harlem because many people who ordinarily came to Harlem for their entertainment . . . were going elsewhere.”<sup>48</sup> Louis’s laboring body offered economic gains not only to business owners but helped to reestablish cultural currency. Although Kane attributed the “slump” in Harlem’s nightlife to a “disturbance” that occurred a “few months ago,” since the Carnera fight, however, “owners [were] encouraged to keep their revues going all summer” and, according to the article, three clubs, including The Cotton Club, premiered new revues. Along with featuring new entertainment, which suggests that the club owners anticipated that their performers would be entertaining a full house, two new night clubs were scheduled to open in Harlem that summer.<sup>49</sup>

When Louis fought in Chicago, the predominantly black South Side also saw an increase in revenue. William P. Harrison, hotel manager of the Hotel Grand, whose hotel benefited immensely from Louis’s fight stated that “I believe that Joe Louis aside from being a good will ambassador, and causing the economic barometer of the South Side to rise to a new high has an added value in respect to creating a greater race.”<sup>50</sup>

Possibly, the respect that Harrison was addressing is that whites were witnessing blacks occupy the same public spaces and demonstrate their monetary citizenship similar to that of white citizenry. According to Rienzi B. Lemus, “fifty-seven thousand paid to see [Louis battle Carnera], and fifteen thousand of them were colored folks. They sat from ringside to cheapest topseats, as did the whites.” The sharing of public spaces and blacks demonstrating via dress and spending their racial equality were of benefit in solving the race problem, according to Lemus. And, similar to Kane’s article, Lemus’s piece for the *Atlanta Daily World* gave credit to Louis

---

<sup>48</sup> David Kane, “Harlem Café Sorry Joe Louis Is Gone,” *Chicago Defender*, July 27, 1935, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Kane, “Harlem Café Sorry,” 13..

<sup>50</sup> Earl J. Morris, “Chi Business Spots Get Break During Louis Fracas,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 17, 1935, 5.

for bringing in revenue to businesses that catered to blacks. Yet, it was not just that “all of Harlem’s colored hotels turned away [people] for accommodations.” Since there were no available vacancies in Harlem, “many had to learn for the first time that the magnificent Saint Theresa . . . wouldn’t refuse colored as guests. (Theresa is a “white” hostelry).”<sup>51</sup> Again, it was through Louis’s laboring body—his actual work—that blacks and whites occupied the same public spaces—sites that were thought to be segregated. Lemus wrote, because of this “whites began to marvel, then admire, the better class colored.” Furthermore, what appeared to be the bonus for black journalists was that Louis brought a thriving economy to “black” spaces during the Depression, thus giving a community a fighting chance to survive during this era.<sup>52</sup> As an ambassador of race, the press believed that Louis’s first loyalty should be to the race. His modeling of respectable black masculinity, him as representative man, and his laboring body all should benefit the race. However, there were moments that Louis could not live up to these constructions.

## **Contesting the Constructed**

In 1941, Dan Burley’s first sports column of the year proved to be prophetic. In “Confidentially Yours,” he lamented the potential problem the draft could pose for black athletes. The draft age, twenty-one to thirty-six, fell within the years during which black athletes were at their prime, according to Burley. An athlete over thirty-six was over the hill and the ones under twenty-one were not yet ripe, needing at least a couple of years of training before they were ready for the

---

<sup>51</sup> Rienzi B. Lemus, “Scribe Says Joe Louis Has Smashed Old Tabooes: Louis Is What the Race Has Awaited,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 9, 1935, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Journalists also saw Louis in aiding with getting legislation passed. Al Monroe wrote that “while a nation arises to proclaim Joe Louis, necessary tonic to bring back the big purse in prize fighting, it seems that another angle, perhaps of more importance to the Race is being overlooked. A matter that will do much to promote anti-lynching bills in the North and wipe out this beast-like reign of terror in the South.” Al Monroe, “Speaking of Sports,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 3, 1935, 13.

pros. Burley reminded his readers that Louis “was over the fence on the 21 side when he knocked out Braddock in Chicago” in 1936 for the heavyweight championship. Without black athletes or potential black athletes, there would be no one to play Negro League baseball, or any future Joe Louises.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, in January 1941, Burley was not too concerned with Louis losing his crown. Indeed, he felt that Louis’s upcoming opponents only posed a minimal challenge to the Brown Bomber. Burley would write with confidence that “from the way it looks from this corner, Louis will remain champion until he quits from sheer boredom.”<sup>54</sup> After Louis’s first fight of the year against James Clarence “Red” Burman, Louis’s white critics began commenting, once again, how he had “lost his punch, his speed, his desire to fight.”<sup>55</sup> Burley indulged these falsehoods and summarily dismissed them by stating,

Nothing that has been said can blot out those pile driving, paralyzing right hand smashes to the solar plexus (belly) that draped the Baltimore challenger helplessly in the ropes in the fifth round. And nothing that has been said or conceived can explain how a man can be slipping when he nearly murders his foe and is able to leave the ring with only a scratch on his forehead as evidence that he has been in a rough and tumble fight.<sup>56</sup>

In March 1941, Burley scooped the white press and the other black weeklies when he announced in the *Amsterdam-Star News* when Louis would retire. With the subtitle, “Dan Burley Reveals That Uncle Sam’s Army Will Force Brown Bomber From Throne of Heavyweight King,” Burley informed his readers that Louis’s draft number was 378 and that he had no plans to ask for a deferment. The article further stated, “the inside reason why the Brown Bomber is so busy fighting” in 1941 is that he wants to “set a record for all time among heavyweights for

---

<sup>53</sup> Dan Burley, “Confidentially Yours,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, Jan. 4, 1941, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Burley, “Confidentially Yours,” 14.

<sup>55</sup> Burley, “Confidentially Yours,” 18.

<sup>56</sup> Burley, “Confidentially Yours,” 18.

defense of the title.”<sup>57</sup> Burley further lamented the fact that white boxing promoters, who in the past had tried to find the next “Great White Hope,” and instructed white sports writers to “lay it on Joe so he’d get ashamed of bumping off so many bums and quit on his own accord” now have Joe Louis to thank for ending his boxing career.<sup>58</sup>

Burley portrayed Louis as a true patriot. According to the article, Louis believed it was a “privilege and a duty to serve his country.” Although Louis could potentially ask for a deferment based on the fact that he was the sole supporter of his mother and his wife Marva, he rejected the idea, believing it “would be less than a man” to use his wife and mother as an excuse for not joining the military.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Burley did see an upside to Louis being drafted. Burley believed entering the army “would also leave Joe with some extra coin in his pocket since Uncle Sam has been digging into the Louis money pouch deeper and deeper...that’s why Louis will retire himself by getting into a uniform.”<sup>60</sup> Burley was also careful to mention that the reason Louis was joining the military had nothing to do with his separation from Marva in 1940 but later wrote that the divorce proceedings “may have unwittingly helped Uncle Sam decide to snatch the champion from the world of boxing.”<sup>61</sup> Burley reminded the fans of the Brown Bomber that in January 1940 Louis was classified as a 3-A, which is a category for men who have dependents. Besides Marva, Louis also listed several other family members, including his mother and his father-in-law. Burley truly believed that it was Marva’s filing for divorce in July 1940 that led to Louis being reclassified to a 1-A in early 1941.

---

<sup>57</sup> Dan Burley, “At Last, Its Out! Real Dope on When Joe Louis will Retire is Outlined: Dan Burley reveals that Uncle Sam’s Army will Force Brown Bomber from Throne of Heavyweight King,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, Mar. 15, 1941, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Burley, “At Last, Its Out!,” 17.

<sup>59</sup> Burley, “At Last, Its Out!,” 17.

<sup>60</sup> Burley, “At Last, Its Out!,” 17.

<sup>61</sup> Burley, Sept. 13, 1941, 19.

In the October 4, 1941 issue of the *Amsterdam-Star News*, Burley announced that Louis had no intentions of renouncing his heavyweight title because of his upcoming military duties. Burley took pleasure in the fact that “Joe’s pronouncement put at rest plans and plots of half dozen heavyweights, including the vanquished Yoga Nova [whom Louis had just beaten when he made the announcement], to lay claim to the vacant title.”<sup>62</sup> Louis’s announcement relieved the anxieties of many black boxing fans. Prior to the announcement, the assumption, at least by the press, had been that Louis would give up his title. In 1941, Louis had been heavyweight champion for four years, almost half the time that Jack Johnson held the crown. But in 1915 when Johnson lost his title, it took a little over twenty years before there was another black champion. Some African Americans likely wondered that if Louis just gave up his title, how much time would pass before whites would allow another black man to be heavyweight champion?

In subsequent articles regarding Louis’s enlistment, Burley continually tried to get his readers to think about how Louis’s enlistment could benefit the race and promote racial equality. In a column entitled “Army Asked to Commission Joe Louis as Officer: Sports Writers ‘Write’ Him Into Uniform; Should Be Placed Where’d Do Good,” Burley tried to encourage fans and other black sportswriters to put pressure on the Army to commission Louis as an officer. Citing how white athletes were commissioned and received non-combat duty especially in the navy, Burley wrote, “not so with Louis. If he is inducted into the Regular (sic) Army, he’ll go in as a buck private and may remain as such, just another khaki-clad rookie, despite his record, the good he can do in a position or on a post that means something to morale.”<sup>63</sup> Obviously Louis was not just some “buck private,” he was black royalty, and he should be treated in the same manner as

---

<sup>62</sup> Dan Burley, “Army to Get Joe Louis and Heavy Title; Nov. 15,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, Oct. 4, 1941, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Dan Burley, “Army Asked to Commission Joe Louis as Officer,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, Nov. 1, 1941, 20.

his white counterparts who also entered the service. Burley further reminded his readers that white athletes and aristocrats who entered the armed forces tended to have “family prestige and fortunes behind them,” which was not the case with Joe Louis. If Louis was to risk his career by going into the army, and by extension, if black Americans risked their hero, he/they should be guaranteed something in return. Burley encouraged his readers to “bombard the War Department with letters asking for a commission for the heavyweight champion. And they’ll listen down there. They’re men.”<sup>64</sup>

In his previous columns, Burley viewed Louis’s induction as having severe consequences for Louis’s career and the sport of boxing, especially for future black athletes. But in this latter piece, Burley seemed to be using Louis as a pawn. Louis had always symbolized racial integration and race progress, but Burley now wanted to put the “symbol” into “action.” He wanted Louis’s induction to be a benefit for the race. In this column, Burley pointedly addressed the double-standard existing in the military and he sent out the call for black Americans to take action. Even if the Army decided not to commission Louis (Louis would later decline the offer), Burley evoked a sense of race consciousness and protest within his readers, which may have been his ultimate goal.

In November 1941, Burley was still trying to instigate a race consciousness within his readers. However, instead of asking his readers to think critically about the policies and actions of the government, he focused his attention and ire upon Joe Louis. The headline for the full-page article said it all, “Dan Burley Says:...Joe Louis Dead Wrong Fighting for Jim Crow Navy, Navy Which Has Prided Itself in Keeping Negroes in Role of Menials, Now Wants Something From One of Us. Would Make Louis Shine Officers’ Boots as Tar, But Needs Bomber Now.”<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Burley, “Army Asked to Commission,” 20.

<sup>65</sup> Dan Burley, “Joe Louis Dead Wrong Fighting For Jim Crow Navy,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, Nov. 22, 1941, 16.

Probably one of the longest titles and subtitles to grace the pages of any weekly, Burley could not seem to decide who to attack in his headline; yet in the article the blame rested solely on Louis. Burley began the column by recalling what Louis had done for integration, the race, and black manhood: "Every Negro, everywhere...is deep in his heart proud of Joe Louis. Proud of him as a man. Proud of his record and what he has done toward breaking down barriers of prejudice and discrimination."<sup>66</sup> However, Burley could not endorse or defend Louis's decision to fight this charity bout.

Initially, Burley framed his criticism around the discriminatory practices of the U. S. Navy and Louis being the first heavyweight champion ever to donate an entire purse. Burley pointed out that the only person not making money on this fight was Louis. Louis's opponent, Buddy Baer; the promoter, Mike Jacobs; and the U. S. Navy would walk away with a substantial amount of money. Burley's column discussed how Louis had nothing to gain from this fight and how the navy was potentially using him. But in the latter part of the column, Burley questioned Louis's loyalty to the race. Burley "pondered" that if Louis was interested in donating to charities, why did he not donate closer to home, such as to the NAACP, the Urban League, or to needy children. Burley then recalled a charity event in which

a horse show was held...in Harlem for the benefit of the Urban League and the Hope Day Nursery. Louis was paid \$700.00 to transport his prize horse, Flash to New York from Detroit, when all the other entries were shipped in free of charge. Without going into whyfores and wherefores of the promotion, it was widely known that the champion's name alone would have made the horse show a tremendous success. But Louis didn't come. The event was not a financial success. Yet the Navy comes along with...the lily-white odor of centuries of anti-Negro tradition which include even the bringing of Negro slaves to this country, and there is a mad rush and scramble to pull down the house, tear up the yard to give them what they want.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Burley, "Joe Louis Dead Wrong," 16.

<sup>67</sup> Burley, "Joe Louis Dead Wrong," 16.



In this passage Burley undoubtedly wanted to invoke the images of slavery and Uncle Tom. Imagining that Louis would make a “mad rush and scramble” to do anything that the navy, or “massa,” wanted would be very disconcerting and the antithesis of what Louis represented to the race. Yet Burley viewed Louis’s “scramble” to tear down the yard and house, both possible metaphors for racial progress, as a setback to racial advancement. Burley compared Louis’s decision to fight for the navy to welterweight champion Henry “Homicide” Armstrong’s refusal to fight in the Hollywood Bowl. Up until Armstrong’s invitation to fight, the Hollywood Bowl had a strict anti-black policy. According to Burley, “Homicide Hank announced publicly that he would have no part of such a contest because he was not connected in any way with anything that savored discrimination and an un-American attitude toward his people.”<sup>68</sup> Armstrong’s proclamation, at least for Burley, proved that he would not sacrifice his race for personal gain. Indeed, in Burley’s mind, Armstrong was a true race man. Burley then challenged Louis to defend his actions. He wanted Louis to address his black fans, those who had supported him by buying tickets and defending him throughout his career, and tell them why he was, in a sense, pulling down the house and tearing up the yard.

Mail began to pour into the *Amsterdam News* and to Burley specifically. The fans were wholeheartedly against Louis fighting for the navy. One reader, a nurse, wrote how she tried to enlist in the U. S. Navy because they desperately needed nurses and was turned away. Singer Hazel Scott also responded. She called Burley’s open tirade on Louis a “direct and beautiful appeal” and commended Burley for his bravery.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Burley, “Joe Louis Dead Wrong,” 16.

<sup>69</sup> Dan Burley, “Fans Ask Louis Not to Put Race on the Spot Fighting for Jim Crow Navy,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, December 6, 1941, 18.

However, one letter presented in the editorial section of the *Amsterdam News* was less critical of Louis. Taking a moralist stance, the writer believed “we cannot with good grace set ourselves up as judges of the extent to which others should make sacrifices for the public good.”<sup>70</sup> The writer (or possibly writers since the pronoun “we” was used) did not see Louis’s gesture as forcing or “shaming” the U. S. Navy into lowering their color line, a position that the NAACP had taken. Instead, the writer hoped that public opinion would force sailors to question the navy’s segregationist stance and force a change of its policies. Robert Vann, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, actually supported Louis’s decision to fight for the navy. Vann, fully aware of the discriminatory practices of both the army and navy and the negative reaction Louis had been experiencing, was impressed by Louis’s honor, patriotism, and “sportsmanship” in promising to fight for his country’s cause. Vann editorialized that ““in this one grand dramatic gesture, Joe focuses the white light of justice on the forces of racial hate and prejudice in our Navy, exposing them in all their meanness.””<sup>71</sup>

In his December 13 column Burley did not attack Louis. This would be the first column in five weeks in which Burley did not chastise, criticize, question, or comment on Louis’s decision for joining the army or in fighting for the navy. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and according to Burley, “there is nothing important on the sports horizon this week”<sup>72</sup> In this column Burley was overtly patriotic, calling for the black athlete to “take part, hitch up his trousers, tighten his belt and pitch in to win the game. But to win the game, he must be willing

---

<sup>70</sup> “Shaming the Navy,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, December 6, 1941, 8.

<sup>71</sup> William H. Wiggins Jr, “Joe Louis: American Folk Hero,” in *Sports and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth Century America* (New York, 2004), 142.

<sup>72</sup> Dan Burley, “Confidentially Yours by Dan Burley,” *Amsterdam-Star News*, Dec. 13, 1941, 18.

and able to demand and obtain consideration that belongs to him by right of citizenship in this glorious country of ours.”<sup>73</sup>

The white press endorsed Louis’s decision to fight the charity bout. They praised him for his generosity and patriotism. Bob Considine, columnist for the *Washington Post* and friend of Burley, seemed torn in his January 9, 1942 “On the Line with Considine,” regarding his position on the issue. The first few paragraphs of the column mentioned Louis’s generosity and how much money the fight would raise for the fund. Considine then presented to his readers a letter that Burley had sent to the journalist, in which Burley outlined why he opposed Louis fighting for a navy that he believed was racist. Although Considine did not endorse or rebuke Burley’s charge, for the readers of the *Washington Post*, what might have caught and held their attention was Considine’s opening statement: “Joe Louis’s generosity is without limits.”<sup>74</sup>

It was after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that Louis finally spoke out and defended his decision to fight Baer in the upcoming Naval Relief Fund charity event.<sup>75</sup> Yes, he was aware of the discriminatory practices in the U. S. Navy, but he believed following through with the fight would be the “most effective method” of combating their racist policies.<sup>76</sup> He even stated that he had already received evidence of how the U. S. Navy was changing their policies towards blacks. “Already the boys in the Navy on the west coast are beginning to get favorable reaction from their superior officers . . . . They told me that ever since it was learned that the Navy Relief Society was to reap the cash receipt of my fight, the whole attitude towards the Negro sailor has

---

<sup>73</sup> Burley, “Confidentially Yours,” 18.

<sup>74</sup> Bob Considine, “On the Line with Considine,” *Washington Post*, January 9, 1942, 22.

<sup>75</sup> Most sources including Mead, Jakoubek, and Wiggins seem to position the bombing of Pearl Harbor before Louis’s decision to fight for the Navy Relief Society, which distorts the controversy.

<sup>76</sup> Wiggins, “Joe Louis,” 142.

changed,” Louis claimed.<sup>77</sup> However, it was not until December 1943 that the U. S. Navy would officially lift their discriminatory practices against blacks.

In order to raise morale among the troops and African Americans, the Office of War Information skillfully used the image of Louis to promote patriotism and heroism. After all, he was the first person to “knockout” fascism when he defeated Max Schmeling in 1938. Thus, the government skillfully disentangled Louis—the race man from the racial oppression and low morale members of the black community experienced in this country—and instead, reconstructed him to represent black patriotism and black citizenship.<sup>78</sup> Thus, even in the ring Louis was no longer a threat to white Americans; every time he knocked out his white opponent the government reaped the benefits. Joe was no longer a black American. He was Joe Louis, American Patriot.

In some respects Burley was right, the war would end up taking some black men in their prime. Although Joe Louis was a hero, he was no longer solely a black hero. White journalists even began to shift the way they described Louis by curbing, if not ceasing, their use of racial stereotypes and caricatures in the press. After the Navy Society Relief charity event Louis was inducted into the U. S. Army; he would later do charity bouts for the army to lift morale for the soldiers. The meticulous image constructed for Louis prior to 1941 had shifted. Louis was no longer the symbol used by blacks to demonstrate the possibility of racial equality and black citizenship. Instead, the Office of War Information transformed Louis into a symbol of American patriotism and sacrifice. During the war, Burley also did his duty for his country. He took part in the United Service Organization (USO) tours in Burma and India as an announcer.

---

<sup>77</sup> Wiggins, “Joe Louis,” 142.

<sup>78</sup> Lauren Sklaroff, “Constructing G. I. Joe: Cultural Solutions to the ‘Negro Problem’ during World War II,” *Journal of American History*, 89, 3 (2002), 4. <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/89.3/sklaroff.html>.

In 1941, Joe Louis represented the epitome of black manhood. He was the heavyweight champion of the world and he could do what no other black man in America could—hit a white man in a public arena—without repercussion. For many black Americans, Louis symbolized the possibility of racial, political, and economic equality. Louis was their hope for integration. Yet, for a moment in 1941, Dan Burley challenged Louis's manhood and loyalty to his race when the boxer agreed to fight in a charity bout for the Navy Relief Society. In Burley's opinion, Louis's decision to fight for an organization that maintained segregationist policies was not a step toward integration, but more like an act of black servitude. Nevertheless, once the United States entered World War II, Louis's reign as race hero morphed into him becoming an American hero. He became a race man no more.

In his essay, "Sport without Final Guarantees: Cultural Studies/Marxism/Sport," Ben Carrington recounts when Karl Marx realized the incompatibility of sport as a structure for dismantling or countering other class formations. As the story goes, Marx concludes, after watching a cricket match in England, that a "revolution ... was improbable." For Marx, "if the masses could be so easily subdued by such a resolutely sedate game with its mores of bourgeois Englishness dripping from every rule and expression, then all was lost for the socialist cause." Marx noticed that sport, in essence, replicates the rules of the governing or bourgeois class, and as Laucella states, served as a means of "community building" in the United States where, because of immigration, racial, ethnic, and class divisions took precedence over a national identity. As Carrington notes, Marx observed "the inherent incompatibility of sport with politics,

and especially of sport with any genuinely revolutionary form of political struggle.”<sup>79</sup> “Politics and high theory simply cannot be articulated with sport,” because sport, as a means to advance a cause “is not merely seen to be apolitical . . . but actively *anti*-political.”<sup>80</sup> This is not to say that the strategy of “muscular assimilation” did not have value for the black masses. The culture of sport, inherently, is “resistant,” according to Carrington, because its existence is about “struggle,” competition, laboring bodies, and no guarantees of a win.<sup>81</sup>

Hitching black racial advancement and the destiny of the race to the successes and “modeled” behavior of certain black athletes, did not reap the full benefits that black writers and intellectuals had hoped for. In the early 1930s, black journalists and race leaders had become disillusioned with old strategies for racial fairness and were grappling for new tactics to navigate the destiny of the race. In his June 20, 1935 column, “Kelly Miller Says,” the journalist acknowledged that the failed strategies to remedy the race problem—by “conscious effort and agitation”—had produced little progress and were outdated.<sup>82</sup> Miller stated that this was the “conclusion” of Du Bois, whom Miller regarded as the “foremost exponent for the doctrine of rectification of racial affairs by protest and agitation” and the spokesperson for the NAACP, which Miller believed was a “militant organization” and had “directed the organized effort of the race.”<sup>83</sup> Yet, in spite of all their accomplishments in directing the destiny of the race, Miller concluded that the “race problem is unbudged” and new strategies must be implored. Miller took an approach that was antithetical to the philosophy of racial uplift. He believed that since the

---

<sup>79</sup> Ben Carrington, “Sport without Final Guarantees: Cultural Studies/Marxism/Sport,” in *Marxism, Cultural Studies, and Sport*. Eds., Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald (New York, 2009), 20; Laucella, “An Analysis,” 8–9; Carrington, “Sport without Final Guarantees,” 20.

<sup>80</sup> Carrington, “Sport without Final Guarantees,” 21.

<sup>81</sup> Carrington, “Sport without Final Guarantees,” 27.

<sup>82</sup> “Kelly Miller Says,” *Chicago Defender*, June 20, 1935, 10.

<sup>83</sup> “Kelly Miller Says,” 10.

destiny of the race was unknown, each individual should be concerned with “duty,” that “each individual should perform the duty which is vouchsafed him without reference to its effect upon the ultimate destiny.” Instead of agitation and protest, Miller suggested the strategy of willed and unwilled effort. The race should embrace, partly, “the philosophy which preached that if the individual looks after himself, the race will look after itself.”<sup>84</sup> Referencing race leaders such as Marcus Garvey, who through “conscious effort” tried to resolve the race problem, as well as poets, scientists, and athletes, such as Joe Louis, Miller argued that individuals should “perform the immediate tasks which lay before them without conscious purpose of settling the race problem.” Thus, Miller was advancing a liberal philosophy based on personal achievements. Miller’s strategy seemed to be an amalgamation of the Talented Tenth, the Harlem Renaissance, and muscular assimilation. However, where Miller parted with race leaders was in his belief that race leaders did want to connect those individual accomplishments as representative of the potential of the race.

Based on her analysis of the press coverage Jesse Owens received at the 1936 Olympic Games, Laucella concluded that the black and white presses were all of the general opinion that Owens was a hero. Journalists, black and white, presented Owens as “the ideal athlete,” who possessed “speed, agility, determination, and spirit” and who exemplified “ideal” manhood because he demonstrated “composure, grace, and humility.” As a role model, presumably for both white and black Americans, Owens possessed inspirational qualities that served him in his public and private life. “He possessed a strong work ethic, which helped him overcome a poor and tumultuous childhood. He possessed strength, which helped him overcome sickness and injury. He possessed poise, which helped him approach life with a positive perspective

---

<sup>84</sup> “Kelly Miller Says,” 10.

regardless of circumstances.” Laucella also suggests that another reason that the press adored Owens was because he was not Jack Johnson. She offered that “unlike boxer Jack Johnson, who epitomized the ‘Bad Nigger’ due to his cross-racial dating and so-called reckless ways, Owens respected boundaries and upheld his dignity. He married young and did not publicly disgrace his wife or carouse, even though there were rumors about transgressions.”<sup>85</sup> What is interesting about Laucella’s conclusion regarding Owens’s press coverage is that her analysis can be extended to Louis as well. The same rhetorical devices that the black press stressed regarding these men’s masculinity—their possession of a strong work ethic, composure, grace, humility, and being self-made, all in hopes of advancing civil rights for all—were universal, that is, characteristic of American values. And it was this same positioning that launched these men from being “Race” men—symbols of the best that the race had to offer, to appropriated symbols that gestured, mostly on the international stage, toward American democracy

Laucella’s reference to the Bad Nigger is also interesting. Within the black press, Owens was never compared to Johnson nor were inferences made. However, as mentioned, Louis was coached to be the antithesis of Johnson—knowing that the comparison would be made—and rightfully so, they both were boxers. But Laucella’s contention that Owens would be compared to Johnson is interesting for that it suggests that ALL black athletes had the legacy of Jack Johnson to contend with. Although the black media did much to protect the public lives of Owens and Louis, biographies disclose that these men were guilty of many of Johnsons’s transgressions. And further, Laucella discursive move of labeling Johnson the Bad Nigger does more than just represent a foil to Owens (and Louis), it also situates Johnson in a pre-modern, pre-urban state while simultaneously locating Owens and Louis in respectable black manhood.

---

<sup>85</sup> Laucella, “An Analysis,” 196–197.



### Chapter 3: Behind Every Good Man

In her 1935 letter to the editor, “Begging from Joe Louis,” published in the *Chicago Defender*, Margaret Baker Richards chastised members of the race whom she believed actively canvassed for charity. These “beggars,” apparently, lacked the will and self-determination to secure respectable employment and become famous based on their own merit as Joe Louis had done and, instead, preferred to “become famous beggars.” She was curious to why these remiss members of the race sat “around and wait[ed] for some one [sic] to get rich over night and then go begging” for handouts from Louis, in particular, and, seemingly, society in general. In her letter she stressed a Washingtonian approach to uplift, reminding readers that Louis “worked for Henry Ford [and Louis] did not sit around and beg for a portion of Henry Ford’s millions; he found out what he was best fitted for and took long and intensive training in that field of endeavor until he became a professional.” She compared those “famous beggars” of the race to a “suckling babe waiting for his mother to come home and give him a good nursing after she hears him crying for milk,” and suggested that those men who opted to get famous from begging, “engage more in some kind of “legitimate work.”<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned, in 1935, many African Americans had hoped Louis would be the next black heavyweight champion. But it was not Louis’s athletic accomplishments or his mythical Herculean strength that Baker Richards detailed to upbraid those African Americans she perceived to be beggars. Nor did she belabor his meteoric rise from sharecropper’s son to world-renowned pugilist to demonstrate the consequences of hard work, productivity, and piety. Instead, Baker Richards connected Louis’s previous wage-earning employment at the Ford Motor Company with his now wage-earning success as a boxer to demonstrate that the reason

---

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Baker Richards, “Begging from Joe Louis,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 10, 1935, 16.

why Louis was “the most popular man in his profession of any race in America” was because he “could meet competition. . . [and] stand head and shoulders” to the white race.<sup>2</sup>

Baker Richards, like many who wrote letters to the black and white press, viewed Louis and Jesse Owens as self-made men. The self-made man, popularized in the late nineteenth century rags-to riches tales, required that the cultivation of this type of manhood be acquired through hard work, adversity, separation, competition, and dominance, as well as other respectable displays of character. These mythical stories, best known as Horatio Alger tales, “were morally uplifting stories that enact a successful struggle to overcome less than spectacular origins and reap justly deserved economic and personal rewards.”<sup>3</sup> These rewards resulted in upward mobility, respectability, and the recognition of one’s individualism but not necessarily riches. However, as James V. Catano argues, the paradox “of masculine self-making lies in its claim to offer the ultimate in freely formed, self-created individualism, while it actually serves to establish a social subject, a set of behavioral patterns, and expectations that are already prescribed” and, perhaps also, a dependence on others in order to provide masculine subjectivity. Thus, men who are constructed as “self-made” rarely are.<sup>4</sup>

Curiously, Baker Richards began her letter of reprimand by acknowledging Lillian Barrows Brooks, Joe Louis’s mother:

May God ever keep His tender hand of mercy over the most wonderful mother of this young man. It was she who gave him the inspiration; it was she who furnished his background with such calm, yet fearless personality, he will be the greatest young man of his day. No wonder he says that ‘his mother is his first love.’ The race is proud of that type of motherhood.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Baker Richards, “Begging from Joe Louis,” 16.

<sup>3</sup> James V. Catano, *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man* (Carbondale, 2001), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Catano, *Ragged Dicks*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Baker Richards, “Begging from Joe Louis,” 16.

It was Baker Richards's opinion that Louis's mother should be given credit for imbuing her son with the "pure stuff . . . that will stand out pre-eminent as a gentleman as well as a champion in the pugilist world."<sup>6</sup> As chastisement to members of the race, this letter to the editor suggested that it was only through proper mothering, hence having the right foundation, constitution, and support, that a man could achieve greatness—whatever that greatness might be.

Joe Louis and Jesse Owens represented the possibilities of economic and political success if a black man was given the opportunity to compete based on merit. It was through sport and the black athlete that black social critics and commentators saw the possibility of acquiring political, economic, and social freedoms, or at the very least, the contestation for their lack. Black journalists were highly invested in the representation of these athletes in hopes that their accomplishments in sport and society would lead to racial fairness for all African Americans. By constructing them as ideal, self-made black men, journalists hoped that blacks would model, or at least attempt to strive for, the type of respectability these men epitomized.

There were codes of behavior that Owens and Louis were expected to follow, and their handlers and the press believed them paramount to breaking down racial barriers. These codes included modeling respectable masculinity—productivity, strength, humility, courage, and wisdom. The concept of virility, however, remained a vexed subject. Black sexuality and virility and their demoralizing stereotypes were issues that the handlers of Owens and Louis were concerned would ruin the athletes' chances for acceptance. As Ben Carrington posits,

the black athlete, abject and feared, debased and reduced to the status of animal-like savagery, is *at the same time* imbued with certain hyper-masculine qualities of virility, strength, power and aggression. Colonial discourse about black physicality and sexuality reemerge with the fascination that is projected onto the 'tough' black athlete, turning the imagined athletic black body into a foundational object for white desires and fears about blackness more generally.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Baker Richards, "Begging from Joe Louis," 16.

<sup>7</sup> Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics*, 87.

Thus, the black male body, and especially the black male athletic body, was already marked as hostile, sexualized, and feared. The existing stereotypes regarding hyper-black masculinity and its antithesis, the hypo-sexualized, submissive Uncle Tom, were reminders of the old Negro and impediments to racial advancements for blacks in the urban North. To counter these existing stereotypes, the black press mediated the public's reception of how Louis and Owens were perceived as black men. Constructing Owens and Louis as contained and effective black men allowed for the public display of a self-made northern black masculinity, and black women played a key role in helping to construct and maintain this image. From helping to construct the black family, to positioning black men as providers, and most importantly, to debunking misconceptions regarding deviant black sexual mores, the women in the lives of Owens and Louis helped define and model the aesthetics of the black family and courtship.

Race reformers “used the language of female respectability” as a tool of racial uplift during the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Reformers believed the solution to the race problem was through women and the demonstration of commonly held beliefs regarding “domesticity and motherhood,” thus they sought to educate and model appropriate values to the lower class and recent southern migrants.<sup>9</sup> “Domesticity, chastity, and self-restraint” were the primary ingredients to respectable female citizenry many believed.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, race reformers, especially black clubwomen, privileged the positioning of black women—as wives and mothers—in the fight for racial justice and focused their uplift strategies on “intensive social service . . . on improving home life and educating mothers.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, the black family, and the

---

<sup>8</sup> Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894–1994* (New York, 1999), 89.

<sup>10</sup> Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 27.

role women played in its cultivation and maintenance, was seen as crucial to the race's survival. Appropriate public demonstrations of the private sphere were political tools used to help counter negative stereotypes regarding black manhood, black womanhood, black mothering, and the black family.

### **Black Mothering: Gentle Yet Thorough**

As newspaper articles and product advertisements would construct it, Joe Louis's mother, Lillian Barrows Brooks, was the shining example of ideal motherhood. Product advertisements and articles in the black press linked Louis's success to proper child rearing. Fletcher's Castoria was one product that linked proper mothering and good health to a child's future success. In a series of advertisement that were displayed in the *Chicago Defender* in 1935, Chas. H. Fletcher used four different advertising campaigns to promote its laxative. One featured Louis as the "boxer" wearing boxing gloves and shorts. Although his mother's image was not featured in this advertisement, her motherly wisdom and instinct were. The headline for the Fletcher's display ad in the September 21 *Defender* read, "A tip from JOE LOUIS before the big fight." The ad, alluding to the upcoming Louis and Baer fight, announced that Louis was "facing the biggest fight of his career. If he wins, it means a match with the champion of the world. And Joe is in the pink of condition. He always has been. Even when he was a baby his mother made sure that he stayed regular and healthy." The advertisement skillfully linked proper child-rearing, self-making, and success to good mothering. Supposedly quoting Louis, the ad continued, "My mother raised me on Fletcher's Castoria until I was 11 years old. It is the only medicine I ever took. And I hope it does for all children what it has done for me." This prescriptive advertisement informed mothers—good mothers—that Fletcher's would not harm their children because "it contains no narcotics. It is not habit-forming. It won't cause purging, cramping

pains,” and similar to the tenacious spirit of every mother with a self-made son, Fletcher’s is “gentle—yet thorough.”<sup>12</sup> Another Fletcher’s ad that appeared a week later in the *Defender* had a more baby-faced Louis, again, wearing boxing gloves and shorts, but with his arms raised in victory over the headline, “JOE LOUIS ... a Fletcher’s Castoria baby . . is goin’ to town!” This advertisement was more inquisitive, asking mothers if they “ever stopped to wonder what good health meant in the rise of Joe Louis?” In this and subsequent advertisements that called on the “voice” of Louis’s mother, the print ad informed mothers that Fletcher’s was the only medicine that was allowed “passed their lips.”<sup>13</sup>

Linking proper mothering, a healthy foundation, regularity, and clean living with success was not the only goal of these prescriptive campaigns. Advertisements that focused on Louis and his mother reminded readers that she was the one who provided a healthy constitution for her son, that she did not raise a weakling, and that “she raised him to be strong” along with his seven brothers and sisters “in the cotton-fields of Alabama,” where oftentimes “there were only potatoes to put in the pot for supper.” As a “wise mother,” Barrow Brooks made sure she “gave [her children] wholesome food. She saw that they had plenty of sunlight, fresh air and exercise.”<sup>14</sup> The Fletcher’s ad portrayed Barrow Brooks as a wise, self-sacrificing mother who, with the help of Fletcher’s, and not her husband, was able to raise Joe Louis and provide the gentile qualities of black masculinity.

---

<sup>12</sup> “Display Ad 4, A Tip from Joe Louis before the Big Fight: Fletcher’s Castoria,” *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 21, 1935, 2.

<sup>13</sup> “Display Ad 7, Joe Louis . . . a Fletcher’s Castoria baby ... Is Goin’ to Town!” *Chicago Defender*, Sept., 28, 1935, 3.

<sup>14</sup> “Display Ad 2, ‘I Raised Joe on Fletcher’s Castoria,’ Says Mother of World’s Knockout Sensation,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 17, 1935, 2; “Display Ad 9, Joe Louis . . . World’s Sensational Heavyweight . . . Was a Fletcher’s Castoria Baby,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 3, 1935, 3; “Display Ad 7, ‘Fletcher’s Castoria Was Our Family Medicine,’ Says Mother of Joe Louis,” *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 1, 1935, 3;

Created to sell a product, these Fletcher's advertisements also provided maps to mothers on how to raise their "children the Joe Louis way."<sup>15</sup> Although Fletcher's and Louis do not promise that the consumption of Castoria would produce a great pugilist, Louis did assert that "if I hadn't taken it I don't think I would have been regular. And if I hadn't been regular I wouldn't have been a healthy child. And if I hadn't been a healthy child I couldn't have been a strong fighter. I hope [Fletcher's Castoria] does for other children what it has done for me."<sup>16</sup> Healthy children, as compared to weak, had a fighting chance to succeed because they were able to compete and Louis was presented as a prime example of a successful competitor.

---

<sup>15</sup> "Display Ad 7, "Joe Louis . . . a Fletcher's Castoria Baby," 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Display Ad 6, Joe Louis Thanks Fletcher's Castoria," *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 19, 1935, 2.





Louis) as Joe Louis reads the bible to them both, and where Joe is, possibly, taking a bite of cornbread as his mother stands next to him holding a plate—demonstrate a mother’s nurturance and a son’s reciprocity. Louis’s comportment is marked by his moral foundation and love for his mother.

In addition to the clearly marked Castoria product advertisement, the black press also published Castoria ads that were disguised as news articles. Similar to the advertisements that contained the Fletcher’s Castoria trademark, these “articles” also linked Louis’s success to proper mothering. Headlines, such as, “Joe Louis Celebrated by Giving Mother a Piano” and “Joe Louis Gives His Mother Plenty Credit,” demonstrated the role of a good mother in helping to create a self-made black man and reinforced the connection that proper child-rearing creates respectable, successful citizens.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in turn, proper mothering is rewarded through public recognition of one’s respectability and marked because of her son’s success. After Louis’s defeated Kingfish Levinsky—in a record time of “two minutes and twenty-one seconds”—he credited his mother “when fight fans and writers urged him to tell how he developed one of the most powerful punches and superb physiques in ring history.” Louis, who reinscribed the self-made man trope to reporters, responded “I thank God every day that [Lillie Barrow Brooks] brought me up right. My seven brothers and sisters and I lived on an Alabama plantation where it was hard to get money enough to eat. But mother managed somehow to get us the fruit and vegetables a health [sic] diet requires and gave us Fletcher’s Castoria to make sure we were always regular.”<sup>18</sup> Despite living in poverty and presumably as a single mother, which she was not, Barrow Brooks “managed somehow” to find food and money to buy Castoria. As a reward

---

<sup>17</sup> “Joe Louis Celebrated by Giving Mother a Piano,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 24, 1935, 14; “Joe Louis Gives His Mother Plenty of Credit,” *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 1, 1935, 10.

<sup>18</sup> “Joe Louis Gives His Mother Plenty Credit,” 10.

for her sacrifice that led to her son's success, as the Castoria ads disguised as news articles demonstrated, Barrow Brooks received public recognition and gifts for her services.

Still, what these ads modeled were the supposed real signs of respectability—that success and its close cousin consumerism would not influence one's true character. Louis's declaration and presentation of gifts to his mother served to model how a son who had reached some level of success should treat his mother. However, as Louis supposedly proclaimed, the real tribute a son should give to his mother was the satisfaction that he was living a respectable life. "I don't smoke or drink and I go to bed early because that's the way my mother taught me to live," Louis asserted. "Winning fights isn't going to change that way of living. The simple life is what I like best,"<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Barrow Brooks echoed the same tenets of piety and humility after receiving a piano as a gift from her son. She vowed that once the family learns to play the piano, that they will sing the "same spirituals [they] used to sing ... down in Alabama when [they] never dreamed there'd be a piano in the family."<sup>20</sup> Black family values and character transcended economic and regional circumstances.

The selling of black motherhood and the mapping of how to raise a self-made respectable black man did not rest with consumer products. The *Atlanta Daily World* published the "Life Story of Joe Louis" by Lillie Brooks, an eighteen-chapter installment that appeared in the newspaper from October 1935 to January 1936. Although these pieces were supposed to be the life story of Louis, the series were mostly about Barrow Brooks, as mother. Chapter "summaries" at the beginning of each installment reiterated, repeatedly, in parable-like form, what sacrifice, toil, and faith would reap for an African American mother. The first installment's summary, for example, again reminded readers of the rewards of having a "self-made" son:

---

<sup>19</sup> "Joe Louis Gives His Mother Plenty Credit," 10.

<sup>20</sup> "Joe Louis Celebrated by Giving Mother Piano," 14.

“From a share-cropper’s farm in Alabama, with eight fatherless children to take care of, Mrs. Lillie Brooks, a Negro mother, now 51, was destined to come into a \$10,000 home, a \$3,000 automobile, and the admiration of her race.”<sup>21</sup> From this installment readers surmised that Barrow Brooks was destined for such worldly goods, because, in spite of the times when she felt she “couldn’t go on,” she sang spirituals, and she and her children were faithful members of Calvary Baptist Church. When reflecting on the gifts her son gave her, Barrow Brooks again took a modest, humble tone, “When I say [sic] about the automobile, and I think of the days on share-cropping, I think of the words of the song that all colored people know . . . ‘Nobody knows the trouble I see.’”<sup>22</sup> Thus, regardless of how much was lavished upon her, the press wanted to stress that Barrow Brooks remained the same modest woman she was before Joe Louis Barrow became Joe Louis.

Equally important to mapping the attitude and behavior of black motherhood was modeling appropriate attire. Returning to the Fletcher’s Castoria campaign, the ads where Barrow Brooks was present show her wearing a modest dress or house dress—again modeling the appropriate behavior, attitude, and attire of a respectable mother. These images served as tools to model respectability, and especially a female respectability, which was palatable and familiar to both blacks and whites—perhaps for different reasons. Barrow Brooks’s presentation of respectable womanhood transcended racial lines. Her embodiment and performance of piety and humility made her the quintessential mother. The press’s seeming preoccupation with appropriate long-suffering and sacrificial womanhood was exemplified by a poem published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, titled “A Lady Who Scrubs by the Day.” The poet, Jazbo of Old Dubuque, waxes:

---

<sup>21</sup> Lillie [Barrow] Brooks, “Joe Louis . . .” *Atlanta Daily World*, Oct. 29, 1935, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Lillie [Barrow] Brooks, “Joe Louis . . .,” 1.

I've just been musing—how strange it seems  
That when daily wending my way,  
The Cheeriest soul I encounter  
Is a lady who scrubs by the day.

. . . . .

Others I meet have a tale of woe—  
It's either too cool or too hot,  
Or business is poor, their health isn't good  
Or they're tired, or bored, or whatnot

I meet her at evening, she's probably slaved  
All day long on her knees  
But never a word about work or toil  
Or an ache, or a pain, or a wheeze

She is quite an object lesson to me  
You may believe me sincere when I say  
That I've learned a lot about courage  
From a lady who scrubs by the day.<sup>23</sup>

Although this poem was written by John Mulgrew, a white columnist who wrote and performed under several aliases, it could have easily been published within a black newspaper and used to exemplify what society deemed appropriate adult female characteristics. As portrayed in the press, Barrow Brooks seemed to personify this characterization. For African American women, however, especially those who were recent southern migrant, Barrow Brooks's performance of black motherhood was recognizable and familiar, and provided a written and visual map to how one should behave in her new northern home.

Still, one must consider how race informed and, possibly, disrupted even these ideals. There was a backlash to such constructions of Barrow Brooks as being the same humble, modest woman who emerged from the cotton fields of Alabama. When a sports columnist from the *Salt Lake Tribune* referred to Barrow Brooks as a "mammy," the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP demanded a public apology, stating that "not only was the word 'mammy' an insult to Joe Louis

---

<sup>23</sup> Jazbo of Old Dubuque, "A Lady Who Scrubs by the Day," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug. 7, 1935.

and his mother but a ‘slur’ against the whole Negro race which she so ably represents.”<sup>24</sup> The apology, however, was less an expression of regret and more of a reinscription of the vexed meanings of racialized black motherhood. Buried within the pages of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* on January 1, 1948 was the headline, “Associated Press Apologizes for Slur on Champ’s Mother,” but no apology was forthcoming. Instead, Ted R. Smits, the Associated Press general sports manager wrote,

You are correct, of course, in saying that we should not have referenced to Joe Louis’ mother as his “mammy” . . . we try consistently to avoid use of terms which carry racial connotations and I am chagrined that this one got into our news apparently unnoticed by editors along the line. I am confident, however, that no disrespect was meant—and, frankly, I doubt that few reader would gather any such impression from the story. “Mammy” is a word usually associated with a Negro, it is true, but it also is a term of affection and, as such, is pretty thoroughly ingrained in our language.<sup>25</sup>

Mr. Smits further contended that he did not find the article “degrading,” and that “it was an interesting story of a mother’s reaction and . . . [exemplifies] a spirit of facing realities that is entirely praiseworthy.”<sup>26</sup>

Similar to Louis, Jesse Owens was often photographed with his mother and sisters. Such staging projected protection and dominion that, normally, would be associated with the father. Owens also credited his mother with providing the foundational character elements of prayer, nurturance, and love, and readily admitted in his autobiography that although he loved his father, his love for his mother was qualitatively different.<sup>27</sup> Hence, it was these men’s relationships with women—primarily their mothers—that the press initially seized upon as helping to form the character that allowed for them to be self-made men. And, it was not only their love for their

---

<sup>24</sup> “Protests Slur on Joe Louis’ Mother,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Dec. 18, 1947, 4.

<sup>25</sup> “Associated Press Apologizes for Slur on Champ’s Mother,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Jan. 1, 1948, 17.

<sup>26</sup> “Associated Press Apologizes,” 17.

<sup>27</sup> Jesse Owens and Paul Neimark, *Jesse, a Spiritual Biography* (Plainfield, 1978), 123.

mothers, but also how well they provided for them. Reciprocally, these men's mothers were also used as models—mothers were supposed to provide, nurture, encourage, and instill a love of God in their male children.

### **The World Has Some Beautiful Colored Women: Modeling Courtship and Marriage**

The women that these men were seen with, allegedly dating, and married to were also scrutinized by the press. It seems that a black middle-class respectable man could only be attached to a certain kind of black woman. It is of interest to note and compare how the black press described these women and how they helped to construct a black middle-class manhood. Women helped legitimize black middle-class respectability. Further, the press seemed to favor a certain “type” of woman. If Louis and Owens were representative of the “submerged tenth,” then their respective ideal mates also needed to demonstrate those qualities of being “quiet, unassuming, wholesome people,” but, of course, this mapping would need to happen on a female body.<sup>28</sup> In this regard middle class did mean a certain station in society—and it also needed to be representative. The women that these men eventually married needed to model a respectability that the press would deem representative of and accessible to African Americans, as well as present a modern black-defined aesthetics of courtship and companionate sexuality.

At the intersection of forbidden black sexuality and sport was Jack Johnson. The sexual legacy of the former heavyweight champion, who flagrantly dated and married white women and was arrested for allegedly violating the Mann Act in 1912, was a shadow that seemed to dog Louis and Owens in the 1930s. In “Advice to Joe Louis,” Frances Valentino wrote a letter to the editor urging the pugilist to not “get a swelled head or become color blind like most of the Negroes who rise to sudden fame and prosperity.” Seemingly reminiscing on what many

---

<sup>28</sup> Other Papers Say—“The ‘Submerged Tenth,’” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 10, 1935, 16.

perceived to be the betrayal of Jack Johnson, she held that “they usually forget their race and turn to white women. The world has some beautiful colored women, especially in Harlem, where our beauticians are prepared to use every beauty application necessary. Take heed. Louis, and look before you leap.”<sup>29</sup> The focus on success, the body, and its muscularity automatically signaled virility and potency that conjured up thoughts of power, strength, and sexuality. Cautious and cognizant of the need to assuage reports that could possibly be interpreted as lending themselves to stereotypes of the black primitive, black sexuality, or, as Ms. Valentino stated, abandoning the race, the press mediated rumors that characterized these athletes as flirtatious, philanderers, or promiscuous in order to maintain their respective image as models of black male respectability.

Both Owens and Louis, possibly with the aid of their coaches, managers, and the black press, managed to avoid any reportage of sexual improprieties with white women in both the black and white press. Biographies of the men discuss the transgressions and extra-marital affairs they engaged in despite the press praising them as good respectable men.<sup>30</sup> In *Jesse Owens*, one of Owens’s friends recalled a post-meet party hosted by Dr. H. Binge Dismond. At this party, and allegedly others, Owens “paired off with a neat, attractive girl, not particularly the best-looking one available for the evening.”<sup>31</sup> Noticing that Owens did not keep company with the most attractive ladies, the friend asked, “‘Why don’t you take the pretty girls?’ to which Owens responded ‘Yeah, you take pretty girls out . . . but I take mine to bed.’”<sup>32</sup> Such indiscretions rarely saw print.

---

<sup>29</sup> Passed in 1910, the Mann Act or the White-Slave Traffic Act, is a law that forbids the interstate or international transport of any female for the purpose of prostitution, debauchery, or any immoral purpose. Frances Valentino, “Advice to Joe Louis,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 27, 1935, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 47–48; and David Margolick, *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink* (New York, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 48.

When Harry Levette penned his July 6, 1935 gossip column, “Coast Codging as Doped by Harry Levette,” he seemed to have several objectives. Most assuredly, he wanted to dispel any anxieties or speculations that blacks may have had regarding their favorite sons’ most recent trip to California, since “Hollywood, ever seeking new thrill and experiences, holds few scruples about color-line when it comes to sepia high lights.”<sup>33</sup> As an omniscient observer, Levette, who was the Hollywood correspondent for the Associated Negro Press (ANP) and whose column appeared exclusively in the *Defender*, tried to quell any fears that, although Owens and Louis ventured into a region known for indulging in many of the seven deadly sins, these Midwestern men held firm to their proscribed codes of northern respectable black masculinity—for the most part. Levette reminded his *Defender* readers that West Coast sexual mores and racial fraternization practices were different from those in the North and that the temptation to cast aside one’s humility, piety, and sexual restraint was strong. Levette reassured black readers and anyone “below the Mason-Dixon line... that Joe kept the same dead-pan to the bewitching smiles and interested looks of the Nordic girlyies who surrounded him on visits to the studios.”<sup>34</sup> This “dead-pan” was the look Louis was schooled to countenance toward his white boxing opponents. When being photographed, Louis was to present little emotion. This rule was meant to counter the gloating and the toothy-grin that Jack Johnson was known for. Another rule that Louis needed to adhere to based on the legacy of Johnson was to never be photographed with white women. The fact that Louis could deliver the same dead-pan look to white women just as he would to white men demonstrated that Louis (as well as other black men) could coexist with whites without desiring them.

---

<sup>33</sup> Harry Levette, “Coast Codging as Doped by Harry Levette,” *Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1935, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Levette, “Coast Codging as Doped,” 8.



Levette's July 6, 1935 column demonstrated that even in Hollywood, a land that was more glamorous than New York or Chicago, Louis remained unflappable. Levette wrote that the twenty-year old "showed nothing of the play boy, although there were opportunities and invitations galore from the prettiest and the most charming bronze babies in the west." Indeed, Louis, according to Levette, was not "excited [in]...the least bit" even though "many ... celebrities and near-celebrities have fallen under the spell of [Hollywood] like a moth into a candle flame."<sup>35</sup> As a "credit to his race," Louis remained self-possessed and did not publicly engage in any untoward activities that would bring shame to him or the race. Levette offered "an equally great compliment" to Owens for adhering to the social mores of his black Northern urban respectability and not engaging in the scrupleless racial fraternizing associated with the West Coast. According to Levette, Owens kept a respectable distance and did not fall prey to the temptations of white female sexuality. He "smiled graciously, chatted with them when engaged in conversation and answered their questions, he showed no especial interest in any of the many pretty ofay co-eds met while here." Further, Owens remained unfazed and unbeguiled by "their admiring looks as they swarmed out on the track among those of his own race to beg for autographs."<sup>36</sup>

Levette's reporting on Owens's public behavior around white women addressed the anxieties that the black press, and undoubtedly black America had, when it came to their race ambassador's public, private, and sexual conduct, and its implications for racial advancement. Owens, having been coached by Larry Snyder on and off the Ohio State University track field about proper behavior, had been advised by Snyder "to translate his athletic fame into a socially

---

<sup>35</sup> Levette, "Coast Codging as Doped by Harry Levette," 8.

<sup>36</sup> Levette, "Coast Codging as Doped by Harry Levette," 8.

useful model of proper behavior, wholesome attitudes, and good interracial relations.”<sup>37</sup> And, of course, “good” interracial relations meant no public affairs with white women. Thus, when Owens demonstrated that he could resist white women and had no attraction toward them—publicly, he countered old myths surrounding unchecked black male sexuality and race mixing and presented a new, more useful representation of black manhood.

Regardless of Owens not showing the slightest interest in white women, it was believed, however, that they would eagerly pursue him. Levette informed his readers that safeguards were “ingeniously prepared by Baron J. Lawson, a well-known local figure in political and musical circles,” and the Assistant Commissioner on one of the many committees that welcomed Owens to Los Angeles.<sup>38</sup> Lawson, acting as Owen’s chaperone while Owens was in Berkeley for his track meet, made sure Owens had “protection from any possibility of rumors of an interracial attachment.” Lawson “show[ed] Jesse around” and surreptitiously included “Miss Frances Curry in the[ir] party.” Curry’s presence, Lawson admitted to Levette, “served as a brake to check the ofay darlings’ enthusiasm or attempts at date making, as they would naturally think Frances was [Owens’s] girlfriend. However, “Levette curiously added, “Miss Curry, charming and talented young musician-actress, and socialite, is a young lady Owens or anyone else would be highly pleased to escort.”<sup>39</sup> Levette’s July 6 “Coast Codging” served to reassure readers that Louis and Owens were still pillars of black respectability, even in California. And, even in California, Owens and Louis had not committed the ultimate act of betrayal—succumbing to white female sexuality.

---

<sup>37</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 54-55.

<sup>38</sup> “California Welcomes Jesse Owens: Fastest Human Will Be Met by Committee of Big Shots,” *Chicago Defender*, June 15, 1935, 14; Levette, “Coast Codging as Doped,” 8.

<sup>39</sup> Levette, “Coast Codging as Doped by Harry Levette,” 8.

### JESSE OWENS GOES IN FOR BEAUTY



A hero is surrounded by beauty. Jesse Owens, sensational Ohio State U trackster, takes time out to pose with this bevy of lovely ladies out in Los Angeles. The girls who consider themselves fortunate to be this close to Jesse are, left to right: Ollie Mae Carter, Alyce Patterson, Louise Robinson Ritchie, Conradine Fields, Jesse himself, Maggie Mae Flemming, Dorothy Johnson, Juanita Harris and Mae Pauter. These young ladies are members of the swanky Club Sophisticates, and entertained with a delightful cabaret party in honor of the track star at the Club Araby.

Figure 3: "Jesse Owens Goes in for Beauty," *Chicago Defender*.

During his visit to Los Angeles, Owens posed for several photographs that were printed in the press. "Jesse Owens Goes in for Beauty" was the caption title for the photograph published in the *Chicago Defender* and showed Owens surrounded by eight well-dressed women who were members "of the swanky Club Sophisticates." Owens, who was in his track attire, seemed somewhat underdressed compared to the women who were wearing overcoats, hats, high-heeled pump shoes, skirts or dresses, and carrying purses. Owens stood in the middle, with four women flanking each side. The description that accompanied the photograph read: "A hero is surrounded by beauty. Jesse Owens, sensational Ohio State U trickster, takes time out to pose with this bevy of lovely ladies out in Los Angeles."<sup>40</sup>

As text, the photograph contained readings of class, work, heroics, athleticism, commodification, masculinity, and femininity. These "swanky" women, who should "consider themselves fortunate to be this close to Jesse," as the caption read, were photographed with him

<sup>40</sup> "Jesse Owens Goes in for Beauty," *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1935, 4.

on the track field, legitimately Owens's place of work, prior to hosting a "cabaret party in honor of the track star at the Club Araby," which can be inferred as their space of socializing.<sup>41</sup> The photograph relied on the intersections of work, class, and desire to present an image of black respectability. For a reader, it may have appeared that this might be the type of woman a working man such as Owens would be attracted to. Could Jesse have his choice of one of these lovely beauties? Although the photo is clearly staged, it alluded to black strength, desire, and even the possibility of courtship. Yet, simultaneously, the *Defender* quelled these notions by discursively embedding the impossibility of a union that would be plagued by incapability and contradictions. Owens is surrounded by eight women and not just one beauty, as the sensational headline of the article stated. Intimacy implies a personal closeness and a familiarity that this photograph does not reflect. Although the women may have found themselves fortunate to be so close to Owens, the track star, and may have had hopes of having an intimate moment that extended beyond taking a photograph, what the image suggested was that these women were out of their element and lacked class compatibility to make any union with Owens viable.

This is why, possibly, when news broke on June 20, 1935 that Owens was engaged to socialite Quincella Nickerson after only spending a few days with her during his visit to Los Angeles, Levette used his July 6 "Coast Codging" to help maintain Owens's meticulously constructed image. In Los Angeles, not only had Owens behaved rashly, he stepped out of bounds by being linked to a woman who did not reflect the self-made ethos that was associated with his class and character. As other organs rushed to give their congratulations, Levette remained skeptical of the authenticity of the story and of Nickerson, who was "too elusive for even the relentless newshound to corner." Although this rumored romance had already been in

---

<sup>41</sup> "Jesse Owens Goes in for Beauty," *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1935, 4.

the press for two weeks, Levette informed his readers “the news must be gleaned and yours truly will not be foreborne.” Levette ended his “Coast Codging” discussion on the matter of Nickerson and Owens with the pronouncement: “I am sure she will be ‘in’ by the next issue.” Although a “pretty young social highlight,” Nickerson was also elusive, which made her suspect. Levette discursively reestablished Nickerson as an outsider. “Coast Codging” reminded readers that Owens adhered—for the most part—to the expectations of the codes of respectability that were expected of him, and that the real threat to Owens’s character and success laid not with Owens but with women.<sup>42</sup>

If it had not been for the impassioned behavior of a young journalist and a photograph, Owens’s impetuous behavior in California would not have made print—at least this was Levette’s take on the rumor that was published June 20, 1935 in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. Indeed, the article, “Owens Reported Engaged To Quincella Nickerson in Their Whirlwind Courtship: Father Denies All Knowledge of Betrothal,” appeared to be conjecture based on suspicion and gossip. To begin with, the unnamed journalist admitted that “although there has been no official announcement to the effect, the Sentinel learned today by close check on the activities of Jesse Owens . . . and Miss Quincella Nickerson . . . that the two have pledged their troth to each other.”<sup>43</sup> What led the journalist to believe that Owens had fallen for a socialite and the daughter of “W. M. Nickerson, president of Golden State Insurance company,” were the allegations that since his arrival in Los Angeles, he and Nickerson “have been almost inseparable,” and “Miss Nickerson’s friends have been commenting upon the fact that she was wearing Owens’s Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity pin.” However, “the traditional significance which

---

<sup>42</sup> Levette, “Coast Codging as Doped by Harry Levette,” 8.

<sup>43</sup> “Owens Reported Engaged to Quincella Nickerson in Their Whirlwind Courtship: Father Denies All Knowledge of Betrothal, Family Friend Confirms Suspicion of Associates,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 20, 1935, 1.

is attached to the collegiate custom of betrothal was not curiously considered [until] Owens revealed to a few close friends his intention of doing some ‘special shopping.’” The friends then concluded, based on the evidence and the “emphasis [Owens] gave to this statement,” he intended to buy an engagement ring.<sup>44</sup>

As probably expected, Owens and Nickerson denied the allegation, but as the journalist pointed out, “their manner betrayed them as much as the ring.” He directed his readers to the “white arrow in the picture snapped by the Sentinel photographer” that accompanied the article. In the photograph, Nickerson and Owens are dressed in overcoats and hats. Compared to the photo of Owens and the eight socialites, this image portrayed an intimacy as Owens and Nickerson are in close proximity, in social attire, and smiling admiringly at one another with the white arrow pointing toward a ring on Nickerson’s finger. The journalist informed his readers that although a socialite, Nickerson shared some of the same values and ethics as Owens. She was “a former student of Fisk University and ... employed at ... Golden State Insurance,” although the journalist was clear not to reestablish that she worked for her father’s company, thereby contradicting the impossibility of a union based on values and social and cultural mores. Further, readers are informed that “Owens, during his short stay in the city, has won many friends because of his sincere and genial manner.” It was Owens’s general comportment and, possibly, his attachment to the West Coast socialite that led the *Sentinel* journalist to conclude, “a host of good wishes are sure to follow him in this [Berkeley] meet and in the matrimonial venture when it is taken.”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> “Owens Reported Engaged to Quincella Nickerson,” 1.

<sup>45</sup> “Owens Reported Engaged to Quincella Nickerson,” 1.



Figure 4: Owens and Quincella Nickerson, *Los Angeles Sentinel*

If, as Levette wanted his *Defender* readers to believe in his reportage of the rumor, that the initial disclosure of the Owens–Nickerson romance was the doing of a novice reporter who relied on conjecture to cultivate a story, then Levette’s own reportage of the story—conversely—would position him as a seasoned, methodical journalist who would be not so quick to rush to judgment based on mere suspicion. In “Sift News of Marital Intent of Jesse Owens: May Marry Los Angeles Society Debutante,” published a week after the *Sentinel* piece and as a “special to the Chicago Defender,” Harry Levette indeed sifted through the facts and the possibilities of this unlikely union. From the start Levette acknowledged the “furore [sic] of excitement” that this news caused and informed his readers that the “big surprise was sprung by Leon Washington, young newspaperman . . . [who] . . . rush[ed] a photographer to the Santa Fe just before the track ‘champion of champions’ left with his Ohio State teammates for Berkeley, the intimate pose was shown in this issue of the Defender was snapped.”<sup>46</sup> Levette disclosed the name of the reporter

---

<sup>46</sup> Harry Levette, “Sift News of Marital Intent of Jesse Owens: May Marry Los Angeles Society Debutante,” *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1935, 4.

and as well signaled his junior status—be it in age, experience, or both. A story which, “at first [had] general credence,” now, Levette suggested, had been blown out of proportion and required “a calmer desire on the part of the majority of the public to check on the authenticity of the report.” Levette reminded his readers of a news article that had appeared in “eastern newspapers” that Owens was married to “Minnie Ruth Solomon of 2327 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street, Cleveland, Ohio.” In “Sifts,” Levette recapitulated most of what *Sentinel* mentioned, such as the pinning, Owens disclosure about doing “special shopping,” and that Nickerson worked for her father, and was a former student at Fisk, but added that “she is very popular,” which stressed her social and debutante status. This underscoring of Nickerson’s social class, counter to the *Sentinel* piece, distanced her from the working-class sensibilities necessary for a future bride of Owens.<sup>47</sup> Levette, informed his readers that although he “was unable to secure a statement from the widely discussed young lady”—because she had not yet returned from watching Owens at the collegiate championships—“an interview with her will be published in the next issue.”<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, as Levette mentioned in his “Coast Codging,” the interview did not take place, and although possibly a tenacious reporter, he was outscouted in interviewing Nickerson and announcing Owens engagement to the western debutante. Bernice Patton’s *Pittsburgh Courier* article, “Wedding Bells for Track Star and Society Belle: Betrothal Made Known on Eve of Berkeley Meet; Jesse Owens to Wed Quincella Nickerson of Los Angeles,” which was published the same day as Levette’s “Sift,” would subsequently be called out—not Washington’s—for instigating the erroneous reportage. Patton wrote that Owens “jumped into the matrimonial arena with the authentic, informal, public announcement that he and Quincella

---

<sup>47</sup> Levette, “Sift News of Marital Intent of Jesse Owens,” 4.

<sup>48</sup> Levette, “Sift News of Marital Intent of Jesse Owens,” 4.



Nickerson, pretty Angel City socialite are engaged to married.” Patton had an “exclusive” interview with Nickerson “who blushing accepted congratulations” and gave details regarding the couple’s whirlwind romance.<sup>49</sup> Accompanied by the same photograph of Owens and Nickerson that appeared in the *Sentinel*, the column, interestingly, focused very little on Owens—no exclusive interview with him—and, as many of the newspaper articles that reported on Owens’s alleged engagement to her, focused on Nickerson and her class status.

Although the athletic achievements and self-made constructions of Owens and Louis were seen as tools for breaking down racial barriers, journalists also viewed both men’s meteoric rise from children of the laboring poor as ways to overcome class barriers as well. Using track and field events as metaphor, Patton discursively played with language and demonstrated how Owens’s accomplishment on the track field allowed for him to break into the society set. “Jesse gave his top performance in the gay social whirl of the young smart set, and forgetting to put on the breaks, Cupid ‘crippled’ him,” and “leaps into courtship” was the language Patton used to describe how Owens “dashed into romance.”<sup>50</sup> Nickerson confirmed the haste of the romance—“Jesse and I are engaged to be married. I don’t know when we will marry. We have no definite plans. Everything happened so suddenly.” Although Nickerson’s comments seemed romantic, fairy tale-ish (keep in mind, this was happening in Los Angeles), and placed Owens as a dashing figure, they also disrupted the well-guarded persona of Owens as a level-headed man who was methodical on the track field and in life. Even Nickerson’s retelling of their initial meeting, although somewhat serendipitous, positioned Owens as hasty and impetuous and her, albeit modern, lacking the middle-class sensibilities for appropriate courtship rituals:

---

<sup>49</sup> Bernice Patton, “Wedding Bells for Track Star and Society Belle: Betrothal Made Known on Eve of Berkeley Meet; Jesse Owens to Wed Quincella Nickerson of Los Angeles,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 29, 1935, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Patton, “Wedding Bells for Track Star and Society Belle,” 3.

The first time I met him was at my dad's office. We were taking pictures in front of the building. I was standing next to Jesse. Somebody said, "move in closer." I did. Then Jesse asked me for my telephone number. I gave it to him and he called me every day, and we went everywhere together.<sup>51</sup>

Owens's wistful behavior was undoubtedly alarming. Race reformers emphasized stable and moral relationships to counter the charges of immorality and emotionality lodged against African Americans. Owens impulsive behavior did not signal a permanency of a relationship but a fleeting one, and their presumed, unchaperoned courtship went against codes of respectability.

Not surprisingly, Owens's engagement made for heavy news coverage in both the white and black press, especially once it was discovered, as Levette's mentioned in his coverage of Owens's dalliance with Nickerson, that Owens was already engaged to Minnie Ruth Solomon. As Baker pointed out in his biography of Owens, there were many inconsistencies regarding Owens's relationship with Solomon. What is known is that they met in junior high school in Cleveland, and Owens was impressed by Solomon because she was always nicely dressed. However, what failed to make press coverage is that while in high school, Owens and Solomon gave birth to a daughter, Gloria Shirley, on August 8, 1932, and Solomon and Owens were subsequently married that same year. Solomon dropped out of high school and worked in a beauty parlor and relied on her family for immediate support. According to Baker, this first marriage became more widely known when Owens needed FBI clearance in 1956.<sup>52</sup>

What made for sensational fodder in 1935, however, was the lovers' triangle that Owens soon found himself embroiled in once the papers reported that he was engaged to Nickerson.

---

<sup>51</sup> Patton, "Wedding Bells for Track Star and Society Belle," 3.

<sup>52</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 30. Levette's article mentions that "a syndicated news item had appeared in eastern newspapers last October purporting to be the expose of his marriage to another girl. It said that Owens and Miss Minnie Ruth Solomon of 2327 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street, Cleveland, Ohio, had married after a seven year romance." However, it seems that the other presses, to my knowledge, did not relay this information to their readers. Levette, "Sift News of Marital Intent of Jesse Owens," 4.

According to published reports, Solomon sent Owens a telegram “threatening to sue for breach of promise.” Owens received her message just before his relay, and “he admitted that it had upset him to such a degree that he experienced some difficulty in winning the race.”<sup>53</sup> Owens began denying he was engaged to Nickerson, saying “how could I become engaged to her? . . . Why there was never any sentimental discussion between us. I only knew her for three days and certainly one could not grow so serious in so short a time. At least I couldn’t. I’m not that sort of chap.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, after reestablishing himself as a level-headed man, Owens relayed to the press and to Solomon that he was a victim of “a framed-up gag.”<sup>55</sup>

The weeklies soon directed their attention to the working-class Solomon and her quest to fight for Owens’s affection. The *Atlantic Daily World* ran “You’d Call San Diego, If ‘Your Jesse’ Were Involved,” a reprint from the *Cleveland News*. Cashing-in on the sensationalism of the love triangle, the *Cleveland News* assisted Solomon in contacting Owens when she “felt her romance with the world’s speediest human. . . was bound for the rocks because of a story which appeared in the Pittsburgh Courier that Jesse had become engaged to Miss Quincella Nickerson of Los Angeles, California, daughter of a wealthy insurance company head.” Blaming Patton and the *Courier*, instead of Washington and the *Sentinel*, “The Cleveland News thought the time had come for somebody to telephone to San Diego, California, where the fleet Jesse then was.”<sup>56</sup>

The *Cleveland News* angled itself as marriage counselor, intermediary, instigator, and gossip. What probably made the scandalous story even more salient was that it represented the intra-racial fears and tensions regarding class, success, and courtship. Similar to Jack Johnson

---

<sup>53</sup> Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 57; “Put on Spot, Jesse Owens Declares He’ll Marry Cleveland Love: Photograph Is Cause of Woes; Sprint Star Denies He Will Wed Rich Western Beauty; To Remain True,” *Atlantic Daily World*, July 3, 1935, 1.

<sup>54</sup> “Put on Spot, Jesse Owens Declares He’ll Marry Cleveland Love,” 1, 3.

<sup>55</sup> “Jesse Owens Sidesteps a ‘Balm’ Suit: Denies West Coast Engagement,” *Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1935, 13.

<sup>56</sup> “You’d Call San Diego, If ‘Your Jesse’ Were Involved,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 5, 1935, 1.

stepping out of bounds and abandoning the race for white women once he became successful, Owens, appeared to have forgotten, if not abandoned, the working class from whence he came. The distance—geographic and class—put into play once Owens went to California was what the *Cleveland News* tried to alleviate.

Long distance telephoning costs money. The longer the distance, the more you're soaked. But when a real newspaper like *The Cleveland News* makes up its mind that some long-distance telephoning must be done, who cares if the call is even to Mars?

The call was \$32. But what does the *Cleveland News* care about that? Jesse Owens, Cleveland's star athlete and the world's running and broad-jumping 'Kingpin' was involved.<sup>57</sup>

Supposedly capturing Solomon's telephone conversation with Owens, readers were allowed to "listen" to a "sample" as Solomon asked him deeply personal questions about his time in California.

"Hello, honey, how are you? I'm all upset. Tell me what is this all about," began Minnie Ruth.

"there isn't a word of truth to it. It's all spitework, and don't let it worry you at all. I'm the one that's worried," came back Jesse.

"Well, what about those newspaper stories? I read a Pittsburgh paper that said you were going out with that girl every night and telephoning her every day.

"Listen, dear, I went out with her just twice, and it doesn't mean a thing, you know that. When we were posed together the newspaper photographer—you know how they are—asked her to get over close to me. I can't help those pictures. Everywhere it's pictures, pictures. The boys ask me to pose here and pose there and pose this way and that."

"now you're sure you have your fraternity pin? Minnie Ruth queried, remembering that one story had it that Miss Nickerson was sporting the pin.

"Don't worry about that pin. Everything that Pittsburgh story said is false. That was cooked up by a fellow who was sore at me because I couldn't get him some passes for the Southern California meet," Jesse explained.<sup>58</sup>

Forgetting that Nickerson allegedly gave an interview to Patton, it appeared that Solomon, and much of the public, swallowed Owens's excuse whole. Once Owens returned to Cleveland, he

---

<sup>57</sup> "You'd Call San Diego," 1.

<sup>58</sup> "You'd Call San Diego," 1.

married Solomon immediately—even having a judge waive the five day wait once a marriage license was issued—at her home. Owens was in such a rush to finalize his nuptial to Solomon, and possibly put the Nickerson scandal behind him that, according to the article, Owens wore the suit he had worn on the train, and Solomon wore a long dress, and although elegant, definitely not the type of wedding dress a society debutante would wear. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, this “wedding set at rest reports that [Owens] was ‘going around with’ a wealthy Negro society girl.”<sup>59</sup>

The press coverage of the Owenses after the wedding constructed them as the ideal couple. A *Chicago Defender* photograph of them locked in an embrace and kissing after their wedding ceremony had the headline, “Smack! Another Record,” with the caption, “Perhaps Clark Cable and George Raft had best look to their laurels or Jesse Owens . . . will snap their records at making love.”<sup>60</sup> Attempting to now construct Jesse as a dashing, romantic figure, a man who once “toted” his wife’s books while they were in high school, the press seemed to be in a quagmire in constructing Owens as a respectable and responsible dutiful husband since Jesse, technically, was still a “boy” in college. In an exclusive interview with Marvel Cooke, Owens “addressed” the concerns of the public who felt that he was too young to marry and support a bride. Eerily resembling a Freudian test-case, Owens told Cooke that “Mother’s mad at me . . . . She wanted me to put my marriage off until I had finished school. But I got tired of putting it off. Ruth and I bought \$500 worth of furniture last year to set up housekeeping and we were argued into putting it off then.” In her article, Cooke noted that she agreed with Owens’s mother—that indeed she felt Owens was too young to marry. Yet, what was also interesting about Owens’s confession was how his disobedience toward his mother still marked him as a child. However,

---

<sup>59</sup> “Dan Cupid Catches up with Owens,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1935, 5.

<sup>60</sup> “Smack! Another Record,” *Chicago Defender*, July 13, 1935, 2.

the next paragraph of the article situated Owens as a man because he not only disobeyed his mother and freed himself from her authority, but he discussed Solomon and himself as a working/middle class familial unit.

As if anticipating the concerns of Cooke and her reading public that he could not be a good provider, Owens responded by saying, “We’ll be all right, though . . . I make pretty good money on the job I have at Ohio State. I made \$1,400 my first year and more than that this year. And Ruth has . . . [a] job in Cleveland. She’s the only Negro girl employed there as a permanent wave operator in a white beauty parlor. We’re both self-sufficient, and Ruth’s got plenty of common-sense.”<sup>61</sup> Owens’s comment that Ruth had “common-sense” situated her as a level-headed middle-class woman, and not an infatuated fan who was only interested in Jesse because of his fame.<sup>62</sup> Although Cooke’s article suggested that Owens would survive financially, the *Atlanta Daily World* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* ran photographs of Owens in the weeks that followed at his new summer job as a gas station attendant at a Cleveland filling station. Captions such as “Running for Money!” and “Jesse Owens Dishes Out Speed” not only played on Owens’s athletic ability as a world-class track athlete, but along with the photograph of him pumping gas and performing maintenance on automobiles, linked work and athleticism. In addition, these photos also modeled the appropriate behavior of any respectable black middle-class married man who worked to support his (race) family, which now included Ruth Solomon Owens.<sup>63</sup>

Although explicit comparisons were not made between Solomon and Nickerson, the photographs and the language used to describe both women were starkly different. As stated,

---

<sup>61</sup> Marvel Cooke, “James Toted Books for His New Bride,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 13, 1935, 7.

<sup>62</sup> “Talk O’ Town,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 6, 1935, 9.

<sup>63</sup> “Jesse Owens Dishes Out Speed,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 28, 1935, 1; and “Running for Money!,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 3, 1935, 3.

Nickerson was characterized as a society girl, a debutante, socialite, popular, attractive, pretty, and beautiful, to name a few of the many adjectives used to describe her station in society and her level of attractiveness. In addition, Nickerson's father was also used to substantiate that she was no ordinary girl. Journalists stressed the relationship and privilege of William Nickerson, president of the Golden State Life Insurance, to that of his daughter, who was employed as a secretary at her father's company. Miss Nickerson's familial connection anchored her in the society set, a demographic that was somewhat at odds with how the press wanted to portray Owens. Although Mr. Nickerson was possibly self-made and may have come from humble beginnings, journalists did not report this. And, even if it was the case, this was not the case for his daughter who had a clerical job at her father's company, a liberal arts education, and bourgeois sensibilities.

Solomon, on the other hand, was markedly different. In comparison to Nickerson, Solomon's parents were rarely mentioned. In photographs, Solomon is shown wearing modest attire—a simple dress—definitely not the bourgeois clothing that Nickerson was photographed in. Moreover, the superlatives used to describe her beauty were limited to just one—pretty. In addition, Solomon's employment as a beauty parlor operator in an all-white salon positioned her more as working class and industrious than Nickerson's white-collar clerical job. Class and race survival seemed to be the underlying subtext in the black press's coverage of Owens's alleged loves. In "Miss Nickerson Explains What Jesse Owens Meant in Her Life," Nickerson made a sharp about-face from the previous article in which she was adamant that she was engaged to Owens.<sup>64</sup> She denied that he gave her an engagement ring and asserted that their time together

---

<sup>64</sup> For articles in which Nickerson alleged involvement with Owens, see "Joe Louis Said to Be Engaged to Niece of Manager," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 6, 1935, 1; and Patton, "Wedding Bells for Track Star and Society Belle," 10.

was “all fun,” and she “treated Mr. Owens the same as [she] would any other visitor.”<sup>65</sup> Bill Crain’s article, as others had, blamed the media for its overzealous reporting of an alleged engagement. Nickerson’s statement that her brief involvement with Owens was “fun,” positioned her as flighty and not understanding his racial importance. Ironically, the same photograph of Solomon and Owens that appeared in the *Defender* with the headline “Smack! Another Record,” also appeared in the *Sentinel* with the headline, “After the Tempest,” again, suggesting that Nickerson was a detriment to Owens.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 5: Comparison of captions from the *Defender* and *Sentinel*

In the summer of 1935, Jesse Owens’s romantic entanglements were not the only liaisons the black press found problematic. Joe Louis’s romantic involvements were also of concern, so much so that in a single article both athletes and their alleged romances would be reported on as if the press was unable to separate the two, and, more importantly, disentangle their personal,

<sup>65</sup> Bill Crain, “Miss Nickerson Explains What Jesse Owens Meant in Her Life,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 29, 1935, 1.

<sup>66</sup> “After the Tempest,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 11, 1935, 1.



public, and athletic achievements from those of the race. As one columnist wrote, “Cupid . . . has pulled a fast one on these brown-skinned wonder boys . . . and I’m kickin. The last thing I wanted Joe and Jesse to do was fall in love. Love is the loveliest and most despoiling thing that could happen to them. It will take the power out of their punch . . . it will strip the ‘go’ from their muscles . . . it will rob them of the physical prowess that has set an entire nation wild.”<sup>67</sup> As this columnist contended, the romantic involvements of Louis and Owens posed dire consequences to their career advancements and by extension racial advancement.

A July 6, 1935 *Pittsburgh Courier* article provided an example of the salacity of the scandal and underscored the concerns the press had toward these men focusing on love instead of their careers. The headline, “Joe Louis Said to Be Engaged to Niece of Manager,” blazed across the page. However, what immediately may have caught the eye of a *Courier* reader were the three most pronounced words: “Joe Louis Engaged.” These three words overshadowed the remaining text and made the rest of the headline seem inconsequential. The sub-headline, “‘You’ll Never Know,’ Says Joe; Jesse Owens in Triangle,” added suspense, carnality, and coyness to the headline and, most importantly, signaled toward the private lives of the athletes. Neither Louis, Owens, nor Nickerson are pictured. Nonetheless, there is a photo of Louis’s supposed fiancée, Miss Elsie Roxborough. The image, which is a side-angle photograph of the “beautiful . . . co-ed,” is directly below the article headline with a sub-headline above her photograph that reads, “Let You Know.” A fuller caption below her photograph states that when questioned about her rumored engagement to Louis, she responded, “I’ll let you know.” The much smaller headline reads, “Famous Brown Bomber Reported to Be Deeply Interested in Miss

---

<sup>67</sup> “Talk O’ Town,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 6, 1935, 9.

Elsie Roxborough, Niece of Joe's Manager, But Won't Marry Until He's Champ, Belief—  
Schoolgirl Sweetheart of Owens Says Jesse is 'Hers.'”<sup>68</sup>

Again, the headline encapsulated the fears and curiosity of the press and black America. The accompanying epigraph, “Affection is a coal that must be cooled . . . else, suffered, it will set the heart on fire,” only punctuated the anxiety the press felt about its two heroes exploring base emotions, which would, undoubtedly, have them devolving into irrationality. Louis's private life was so closely contained and maintained that his response, “You'll Never Know,” suggested that, unlike Jack Johnson who would publicly display, or rather, put on public display, his female companions, hence his sexuality, Louis would not be one to discuss or display his personal life. And even if Louis would ever be so careless as to be caught behaving like a playboy, he more than likely was assured that the press would protect him, thus helping him maintain the image of the calm, rational figure. Miss Roxborough's response was equally evasive—possibly learning from the fall-out of the Owens scandal. She, too, would not divulge any intimacies of her relationship with Louis. She, too, was modeling respectable behavior—unlike Nickerson. What was interesting, though, despite much of the headline being focused on Louis, the majority of the article was about Owens.<sup>69</sup>

Elsie Roxborough, society debutante from Detroit, student at the University of Michigan, member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, daughter of ex-state senator Charles Roxborough—and, perhaps, most importantly, niece of John Roxborough, Joe Louis's manager—was rumored to be engaged to Louis.<sup>70</sup> At first blush, it appeared that the black press's treatment of both men's rumored engagements were handled differently, albeit, as stated, columnists minced no words in

---

<sup>68</sup> “Joe Louis Said to Be Engaged,” 1.

<sup>69</sup> “Joe Louis Said to Be Engaged,” 1.

<sup>70</sup> “Joe Louis Said to Be Engaged,” 1.

their opinion regarding how love and marriage could potentially seal the fate of both men's careers and advancement for the race. Still, there was a qualitative difference in the black presses reportage and feeling toward Roxborough. Maybe it was due to Miss Roxborough being a girl from Detroit and not from some foreign land such as Los Angeles, or that she had plenty of friends in Chicago, where she spent her summers, which made it seem that she was known or that her values would be familiar, or the fact that she was Roxborough's niece, or, like Joe and Jesse, she was a Northern girl regardless of her social circle that the press treated her more kindly than Nickerson.

The reportage of Louis and Roxborough's relationship, similar to the Owens and Nickerson romance, read of conjecture and hearsay. According to the article, "it had been whispered about for some time, that Joe and Elsie were more than just pals, being seen together quite often, but seldom alone." The use of the word "whisper" implied secrecy and rumors, as well as discretion. Bragging and boasting violated the code of respectability that Louis was assigned. In addition, in mentioning that they were never alone, the boxer demonstrated how a proper gentleman courts a potential female companion. Never being seen alone suggests a wholesome dating experience where sex is factored out of the equation.<sup>71</sup>

Seemingly pressured to give a more definite response than, "I'll let you know," Elsie Roxborough denied that she was engaged to the champ in an article that appeared in the *Pittsburgh Courier* the following week. In "Merely Friendly with Joe Louis, Says," Roxborough declared that she and Louis "are merely friends . . . and both have respective careers to follow." Positioning Roxborough as a career woman, the article continued that "'writing is uppermost in [her] thoughts at the moment.'" The purpose of the article, as the piece clearly stated, was to "set

---

<sup>71</sup> "Joe Louis Said to Be Engaged," 1.

at rest the rumors which had been circulating for some time to the effect that the reported friendship between the now famous fighter and the charming young Detroit socialite might end at the altar.”<sup>72</sup> To put down any further anxieties, the article continued that, “Joe Louis’ attentions . . . were more definitely directed toward winning the world’s heavyweight championship and that this objective was occupying most of his time.”<sup>73</sup> Ephemeral emotions took a backseat to practical aspirations, as the article announced, “Dan Cupid doesn’t have a possible chance.” Interestingly, however, another article, one that would have normally appeared on the society page, was bracketed within “Merely Friendly.” This piece, entitled “Louis Guest at Detroit Dance,” mentioned how Roxborough accompanied Louis to a dance. Apparently, the press was keeping its eye on Miss Roxborough.<sup>74</sup>

The *Chicago Defender*’s follow-up to the alleged engagement that was printed a week earlier was more firm in its declaration that Louis and Roxborough were “just platonic friends—nothing else” as compared to the *Courier*’s article, which left room for doubt. In “Joe Louis to Wed? ‘NO’ Assert Both,” Roxborough “advised” the *Defender* “by wire” that she and Louis “are merely friends” and to stop the rumors that she and Louis were engaged. According to Roxborough, her “career as a writer is much more important to [her] than the thought of marriage.” She does think, however, that “Joe is a fine fellow and well deserving of any girl.”<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, Louis also felt that “‘Elsie is a fine girl,’” however, she “‘has her books to think about which allows little time to think of marriage.’” The *Defender*’s article elucidated that Roxborough was a student at the University of Michigan majoring in journalism, a detail that the *Courier*’s article did not provide. The *Defender* article seemed to also be more balanced, insofar

---

<sup>72</sup> “Merely Friendly with Joe Louis, Says,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 13, 1935, 1, 4.

<sup>73</sup> “Merely Friendly with Joe Louis, Says,” 4.

<sup>74</sup> “Merely Friendly with Joe Louis, Says,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 13, 1935, 4.

<sup>75</sup> “Joe Louis to Wed? ‘NO’ Assert Both,” *Chicago Defender*, July 13, 1935, 1.

as it provided equal attention through first-hand accounts and commentary on Roxborough and Louis. Joe, explaining why marriage was an impractical option at the time stated,

as for me I know well that there is plenty of fighting ahead of me, too much to slow down now and think of marrying. There is that little thing of winning the championship first you know and after that I'll have plenty of time to think of marrying. You forget I am still a young man just past my twenty-first birthday don't you?' With this said, Joe grabbed his seat in an automobile and started on a trip to the country.<sup>76</sup>

Again, it is worthwhile to examine the intersection between class, labor, gender, and race as foundational subtext for this article. As stated, the purpose of both articles was to ease the anxieties of African Americans that Joe Louis might forsake his career (and the race) for love. By making careers the utmost important pursuits for both, the article linked racial advancement and labor. The article positioned Roxborough as a career woman—she was a writer—yet the *Courier* article did not mention her genre of writing, the success she had as a writer, or where she was in her writing career, whereas the *Defender* did provide some information on her. Hence, what is of value in both articles is that she was career minded (if not a career woman), socially connected, attractive, and affiliated with the Midwest/North (Chicago). The article presumed that this was all that readers needed to know about Roxborough, beyond the assumption that she would not jeopardize Louis winning the championship.

Louis was also positioned as a career professional. However, although pugilism was his occupation, it was not viewed as a long-term career nor is it accorded the same professionalism as a writer. But Louis's occupation had an end goal—a different type of gold watch, per se. It was the heavyweight championship, and the press concerned itself with outlining, step-by-step, the opponents Louis needed to defeat in order to achieve the crown. Yet, the article that appeared in the *Courier* situated both their careers—careers that were generally unavailable for the

---

<sup>76</sup> "Joe Louis to Wed?," 1.

average black American—and used them as models suggesting that it was work and labor that needed to be at the forefront of the race’s effort in order to achieve racial equality. The *Courier* and the *Defender* stressed work. Where the two articles diverged was their emphasis on the type of relationship they thought Louis was in. The *Courier* article never mentioned the word *marriage*, only engaged, whereas the *Defender* did use the word *marriage*. Was there something connotatively different about saying marriage versus engagement? Did marriage somehow signify a finality that engagement did not? Ultimately, both articles sought to contain the anxieties of the black public regarding Roxborough.

Still, Louis’s managers and the press could not and would not contain all scandals involving Louis. One week after Roxborough and Louis denied any romantic involvement, the *Pittsburgh Courier* printed on its front page, “Love K. O. Threatens Joe Louis As Deb Hurls Brick At Car.” The *Courier*, possibly seeking vindication for its original reporting of a romance between Louis and Roxborough that was denied by Roxborough in a letter she wrote to the press informing them that she was very much embarrassed “to have [her] name associated with [her] uncle’s prizefighter,” broke the news (probably also to the embarrassment of Roxborough) that Roxborough threw a brick through Louis’s car after he snubbed her for Bennie Mitchell, a “former chorus girl” who was “crowned ‘Queen of Detroit’s Night Clubs’ in February.”<sup>77</sup>

Rollo S. Vest’s article poked fun at this spectacle involving Roxborough and Mitchell fighting over the affection of the Brown Bomber. Previous articles characterized Roxborough as a society girl with social graces and class. However, Vest now portrayed her as unstable, jealous, and irrational. Vest, wrote that Roxborough, “suffering from a severe case of the Green Eyed Monster,” “hurled” a “cute little red brick . . . through [Louis’s] shiny Buick [which] did plenty of

---

<sup>77</sup> Rollo S. Vest, “Love K. O. Threatens Joe Louis as Deb Hurls Brick at Car,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 20, 1935, 1.

damage to his automobile and feelings.”<sup>78</sup> What caused Roxborough to lose her composure was Louis’s alleged attraction to Mitchell, who he was supposedly introduced to at a Detroit nightclub. A few days later, Louis, Roxborough, and Mitchell were at another nightclub, Frogs Club, where Louis’s manager and employees of the club hosted a party. It appeared that at the Frogs Club Louis was paying extra attention to Mitchell and then “the brown-skinned wonder boy, slipped away from the party, taking the former chorus queen with him.” According to the article, they went to the Plantation Club, the site of their introduction, where they had a table to themselves. According to Vest, Roxborough “wasn’t far behind. She steamed up to the Plantation, and on seeing Joe’s car parked outside, hurled a brick through one of the pretty, shiny windows.”<sup>79</sup> Roxborough, the society deb, albeit from Detroit, who dared to date Louis, was now marked as irrational, humiliated, and scorned.

Of course, the irony is not lost that it was at (and not on) the Plantation that this encounter took place. Nor should it be overlooked that in this article, compared to others, Louis is very much a backdrop; the main characters are Roxborough, Mitchell, the Plantation, and the Buick. The role that the brown-skinned buck played in this melodrama was the sexualized, passive, commodified victim, whose automobile and feelings may have taken a brick, but not his manhood. Indeed, Vest calling Louis initially in the article “the Brown Bomber,” and then a few paragraphs later, “the brown-*skinned* wonder boy,” reflected a slippage from fistic power to sexualized power.<sup>80</sup>

Yet, Louis was merely a “boy” in the clutches of Mitchell, the “Goat-Getter,” which was the banner that appeared above her picture in this article. Along with this unfavorable moniker,

---

<sup>78</sup> Vest, “Love K. O. Threatens Joe Louis,” 1.

<sup>79</sup> Vest, “Love K. O. Threatens Joe Louis,” 1.

<sup>80</sup> Vest, “Love K. O. Threatens Joe Louis,” 1; emphasis mine.

the article also suggested that Mitchell may not be the type of respectable woman the champ or any man needed. Vest wrote that Mitchell “is one of those God’s Gift to men who can do more damage to a man’s heart in five minutes than lethal gas in the prescribed lawful death. She caught Joe’s eye and charmed him like a cat hypnotizes a bird.” Mitchell was characterized as a seductress, someone who, despite all of Louis’s accomplishments in the boxing ring, could level him in five minutes.<sup>81</sup> It was unclear how this spectacle tarnished Louis’s reputation since follow up reportage was not found. However, the following week the *Defender* tried to keep Louis’s chivalry and glory intact by printing, “Joe Louis Stops Runaway Horse; Rescues Woman.” After dismounting from his horse and “walking toward the dining room,” Louis “heard the screams of the woman. Leaping to his horse, the Brown Bomber galloped off in pursuit of the flying horse which was heading toward a high fence. Joe and his mount caught the reins and pulled the horse to a stop. The rider had fainted.”<sup>82</sup> The validity of the story was irrelevant. Louis, acting like a western hero, was, again, a mythological knight in saving a damsel in distress. (It was not reported when and why the unknown woman fainted.)

Fainting women were not the only forms of damage control used to reestablish Louis as a respectful, if not respectable, gentleman. When Louis appeared in public with a woman that was not his mother or sister, the press mentioned not only the name of the female friend but also the male friends who were also in attendance. For example, in “Joe Louis Visits Tennis Meet but Loses to Rain,” Ruby Marchant made note that “three friends, Miss Martha Trotter, Fred Guinyard and Alf Thomas, all of Detroit,” accompanied Louis to Wilberforce University in Springfield, Ohio, and all other social engagements while he was there.<sup>83</sup> Still, painting Louis as

---

<sup>81</sup> Vest, “Love K. O. Threatens Joe Louis,” 1.

<sup>82</sup> “Joe Louis Stops Runaway Horse; Rescues Woman,” *Chicago Defender*, July 27, 1935, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Ruby Marchant, “Joe Louis Visits Tennis Meet but Loses to Rain,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 24, 1935, 13.



the chivalrous black hero within the press did not stop persistent rumors on the streets. The black press, it seemed had a field day teasing their readers with articles or snippets of gossip regarding Louis's love life. Yet, the reportage of these "alleged" romances, as evidenced from the Roxborough and Mitchell incident, tended to poke fun at the women or construct Louis as an irresistible Casanova—a role, ironically, that the black press would never let him fully embody. The *Defender* appeared to be the organ, as opposed to the *Courier*, more inclined to neutralize or debunk rumors that Louis was a womanizer.

Twice in August 1935, the column "Everybody Goes—When the Wagon Comes!" printed stories of alleged romances involving Louis. Al Monroe's "Everybody Goes" was a well-known gossip column in the *Defender*, often reporting rumors and alleged misdeeds of local citizens and celebrities. The August 10, 1935 lead for "Everybody Goes" was about Louis and his supposed "girlfriends." Monroe wrote that Louis,

has run into the evil of too many girl friends [sic], only Joe doesn't know where they are . . . The Wagon has heard of 'girl friends at any cost' but never girl friends at any distance. . . . ONE very cute little person claims Joes as her boy friend simply because the BOMBER stepped on her foot as he passed enroute to the ring for training. . . . SHE SAYS he purposely walked on her new white shoes. . . Still another cute number is claiming Joe's attention on the basis of his having been examined by the same physician that gives pills to her . . . THAT. . . is what is called loving by remote control.<sup>84</sup>

It was possible that Monroe was trying to counter the articles that were printed in the *Courier* a month earlier regarding Louis and Roxborough, as well as other tales of alleged romances that may have been circulating elsewhere. In this "Everybody Goes," Monroe shifted responsibility for Louis's alleged indiscretions from him to the obsessed and delusional female, consequently absolving Louis of any involvement. What Monroe was essentially reporting was that readers

---

<sup>84</sup> Al Monroe, "Everybody Goes—When the Wagon Comes!," *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 10, 1935, 6.

should not take any of these rumors seriously since the women reporting them actually did not know Louis or misinterpreted any relationship the two may have had.

Yet, Monroe also seemed to fuel rumors of romance. In the August 24, 1935 “Everybody Goes,” Monroe sparks more romance rumors while simultaneously calling attention to the expensive automobile Louis bought after he beat Levinsky.

Joe (Levinsky-Carnera) Louis, that \$8,000 car of yours is the berries. When are you going to give that little girl out on the extreme South Side a ride? AND JOE, why not put the little girl on Indiana avenue [sic] in the rear seat? However, even then you’d break the hearts of come 20 or 30 others, wouldn’t you, Joe?<sup>85</sup>

Monroe was contradicting his earlier “Everybody Goes” by alluding to Louis being a “heartbreaker.” Still, this piece also suggested intimate knowledge of a specific female, or two, that Louis was possibly involved with. Undoubtedly, this information raised the curiosity of many “Everybody Goes” readers, and definitely for those in Chicago, causing them to be more alert to Louis and a female who lived on the “extreme South Side” of Chicago. What is also interesting in this snippet is the recurring link between women and cars as markers of status. Louis’s new car—a Lincoln—was purchased after he defeated Levinsky (and after the supposed brick-throwing incident by Roxborough), a win that would get him one step closer to the heavyweight title. Louis’s manhood, then, was not just tied to him being a champion boxer but also to the accoutrements this could buy—including women.

If the images of Louis, as a knight saving the unknown damsel in distress or as a passive victim of the disillusioned, were tools of damage control, then the announcement of his engagement to the working-class Marva Trotter remade him as representative black man uniting with a representative African American female—and not the society deb or the black siren—and firmly placed them both as emblematic of modern northern black nuclear couple. Indeed, the

---

<sup>85</sup> Monroe, “Everybody Goes,” 6.

remaking of Louis and Owens as self-made husbands and providers allowed for them to model the respectable aesthetics of a modern black couple.

The formal announcement of Louis's engagement appeared in September 1935. Both the black and white presses published articles on Louis's impending marriage and about Trotter. However, the black press took considerably more interest in her not only as Louis's future bride, but also as a model of black womanhood. According to David Margolick, the *Afro-American* was pleased with the selection reporting that Marva was "an old-fashioned girl, sweet, clean, modest, pretty. . . she has intelligence, poise, common sense. She has personality and is a pleasant, friendly type who makes friends because she is cheerful and kindly."<sup>86</sup> If, as Margolick wrote, the relationship between Louis and Trotter was "engineered" by Louis's handlers, Julian Black and John Roxborough, "as some suspected. . . [then] they had selected well."<sup>87</sup>

Still, for those black Americans who were faithful weekly readers of the *Defender* and devoted Louis fans, the September 7, 1935 headline may have been their worst nightmare: "Louis Confirms Marriage Rumor: Car Enroute Here To Get Future Bride." Of course, this was not the first time the black press had linked Louis erroneously to a female. Consequently, it seemed the initial announcement of a rumored wedding was handled quite cautiously by the *Defender* in order to avoid the possibility of an embarrassment. Treading lightly in its September 1, 1935 article, the *Defender* reported, "Joe Louis to Wed IS New Rumor: Bomber Denies Report in Statement." Seemingly attempting to make sure not to upset Louis, the article begins with Louis's denial of the rumor.

The article then proceeded to address the "persistent rumor" that Louis denied, but was "not entirely denied by the girl herself." The rumor was that after the Max Baer fight on

---

<sup>86</sup> Margolick, *Beyond Glory*, 100.

<sup>87</sup> Margolick, *Beyond Glory*, 100.

September 24, 1935, “Miss Marva Trotter, of Chicago, pretty stenographer, will be married immediately” to Louis. This rumor, which seemed to have started when Louis was training for the Levinsky fight a few months earlier, “gained momentum when she went to Detroit for a visit.” Adding more fuel to the rumor was the fact that this was the second visit by Trotter to the Bomber’s home town and that this last visit was made in his brand new \$7,200 automobile. Additionally, she was a member of the party that accompanied Louis when he went to Springfield, Ohio. The *Defender*, being quite thorough in its fact checking, noted in the article that Trotter confirmed all bits of evidence, which taken in their totality, could lead one to conclude that she and Louis were engaged. However, “Miss Trotter in an interview with The Chicago Defender, admitted every question asked save the actual announcement of her engagement, however, she did say ‘you may be right at that.’”<sup>88</sup>

By September 5, Louis was no longer denying his impending marriage to Trotter. The white press, of course, broke the story first since they were dailies—it is unclear why the *Atlanta Daily World* did not break the news as well since it was also a daily. In the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, there was only a brief announcement of Louis’s engagement buried in sports highlights, providing Louis’s only statement, “Yes, we’re engaged.”<sup>89</sup> Expectedly, the black press approached and addressed the Louis–Trotter engagement differently, by not focusing on Louis, but on the woman he intended to marry.

Many of the black weeklies reported the engagement on September 7. The *Amsterdam News*, recognizing that Louis was not just a symbol of racial prosperity, but also a black heartthrob, began “Joe Louis Will Wed This Month” by acknowledging that “the hopeful

---

<sup>88</sup> “Joe Louis to Wed Is New Rumor,” *Chicago Defender*, 10.

<sup>89</sup> “Louis Confirms Reports of Romance in Chicago,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 5, 1935, 12; and “Article 15,” *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1935, 30.

feminine hearts” will be crushed “for the Brown Bomber is no longer Negro America’s most eligible bachelor.” Trying to also counter impressions that Trotter was marrying Louis only because he was the Brown Bomber, the paper quoted Trotter as saying that she was “not marrying [Louis] because he is a great fighter. He’s a fine man, modest and gentlemanly.”<sup>90</sup> And, again, trying to appease the black public’s fears—especially those of black men, the article mentioned that at Louis’s training camp at Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, “everybody seemed happy over the approaching event. Everybody except the sparring partners who believe that Louis’s elation is adding too much steam to the already irresistible punches he has been landing on their domes.”<sup>91</sup> Appeasements notwithstanding, some African Americans were opposed to Louis marrying Trotter, or anyone, for that matter. In a *Courier* poll, of the “fifteen people in Detroit ‘representing all walks of life,’ eleven opposed Louis’s marriage to Marva,” believing that marriage would cost him, and African Americans, the opportunity for the heavyweight championship.<sup>92</sup>

The *Chicago Defender*, on the other hand, equally wanted to promote that it had scooped other weeklies and dailies by announcing Louis’s engagement weeks earlier and now had “exclusive communication [in] making the first authentic announcement” from the Brown Bomber. As before, the link between Trotter, middle-class respectability, and consumerism was implied when the *Defender* reported, yet again, that Trotter would “leave for the fight September 16 in the Bomber’s \$7000 automobile,” and accompanying her to Pompton Lake would be Louis’s mother and sisters.<sup>93</sup> Trotter was not traveling to Pompton Lake, Louis’s training camp,

---

<sup>90</sup> “Joe Louis Will Wed This Month: Confirms Engagement to Chicago Miss,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 7, 1935, 1.

<sup>91</sup> “Joe Louis Will Wed This Month,” 1.

<sup>92</sup> Margolick, *Beyond Glory*, 101.

<sup>93</sup> “Louis Confirms Marriage Rumors: Car Enroute Here To Get Future Wife,” *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 7, 1935, 1.

alone. She, essentially, was being chaperoned by Mrs. Brooks and Louis's sisters. As before, the press took measures to demonstrate proper courting behavior and to thwart any inkling of sexual impropriety. Trotter would not be alone with or be a distraction to Louis while he was training for the fight, and Trotter's inclusion in the Barrows/Brooks family signified that Louis's family accepted her, as should his larger race family. The black press made sure to report that this impending marriage, or Marva, would not affect Louis's performance or his self-discipline. At Pompton Lakes, Louis "tried to run a disciplined camp" and avoid distractions and visitors that "would interfere with [his] daily routine." Yet, a few visitors, civil rights activists and NAACP members Charles Hamilton Houston, Roy Wilkins, and Walter White, were able to meet with Louis. It was reported that when Louis was not training he was "studying history, math, geography, the New Testament, the life of Booker T. Washington, the Italo-African conflict, and etiquette."<sup>94</sup>

The *Defender* article continued that "Miss Trotter who had been employed in the offices of a Chicago dentist has resigned that position and is making plans for the trip East."<sup>95</sup> Accompanying the article was a photograph captioned, "Future Mrs. Louis Takes Dictation." In the photograph, that was clearly staged, Trotter is taking dictation from Mrs. E. A. Welters, the wife of Trotter's employer, "a local chemist."<sup>96</sup> That the article and the caption provided contradictory information regarding the exact profession of Trotter's employer, and that it was probably photographed after she quit her employment, seemed irrelevant. What was probably more important and symbolic, however, was that image demonstrated that Trotter had professional employment and was working among white Americans—a sign a racial

---

<sup>94</sup> Margolick, *Beyond Glory*, 101.

<sup>95</sup> "Louis Confirms Marriage Rumors," 1.

<sup>96</sup> "Louis Confirms Marriage Rumors," 1.

advancement. In another interview with a white press outlet, Louis stated that Trotter had quit her job around June after her mother's death and around the time of the Louis-Carnera bout. After she quit her job, Trotter moved in with her father.<sup>97</sup> These details, that Trotter lived with her father, and probably more important, that she was unemployed, did not make it into the black press. The type of woman that Louis needed to marry, similar to Owens, would imbibe the Washingtonian philosophy of an industrial education, be self-made and self-sufficient, be close to Louis's mother, a woman that, at least in the press, would be the object of Louis's devotion, and exemplify middle-class status and consumerism. Similar to other black weeklies, the *Defender* did not make mention of Trotter's parentage. It seemed that self-made women, such as Trotter and Solomon, did not need their pedigree on display as did Roxborough and Nickerson.

A white daily that did pay attention to the future Mrs. Louis was the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. In an article steeped in signification, snide comments, and stereotypical insinuations, the article was more concerned with mocking Louis and Trotter than allowing them to take a seat at the table of middle-class respectability. Harvey Woodruff began his article "Yes, Sir! Future Mrs. Joe Louis Is a Good Cook," with the opening sentence, "Sure, she can cook southern fried chicken." Seemingly trying to force Louis into violating some of the rules that his handlers tried to make him uphold and demonstrate a more rural stereotypical southern masculinity, Woodruff asked Joe questions that would make him drop his "dead-pan countenance [which] was subject of wondering comments," show his "regular and glistening teeth," and demonstrate his rudimentary education. The article was riddled with snobbish language to discredit Louis, such

---

<sup>97</sup> Harvey Woodruff, "Yes, Sir! Future Mrs. Joe Louis Is a Good Cook," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 8, 1935, B4. According to Enoch Waters, he "was the first newsman to discover" the Louis and Trotter engagement. Dr. E. A. Walters, who provided the information to Waters and was also a state representative, regarded the *Defender* "as the personal facility he needed to keep in touch with his broad interests. Every week he wanted some story covered, or an article he had written, published." See Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press* (Chicago: 1987), 193.

as the comment, “This correspondent had feared the Brown Bomber might be diffident or secretive about his romance. Far from loquacious—Joe probably never will be loquacious—he was ready and willing to discuss the subject. He answered questions about Miss Trotter and his plans with even more animation than those about his impending bout with Baer.”<sup>98</sup> Louis’s uncharacteristic behavior of being animated, smiling, and willing to discuss his relationship with a woman might have been seen as regressive and not exemplary of New Negro sensibilities. Whereas the black weeklies wanted to assure their readers that this impending marriage would not make Louis lose focus and be demonstrative of a weakness, Woodruff’s article, albeit slightly jocund, attempted to disarm Louis and make him less of a “wonder” for many white Americans.

Much of Woodruff’s interview with Louis was concerned with Trotter’s culinary skills and employment history, and, of course, Louis’s retirement. Woodruff asked Louis odd questions about what food items Trotter could cook, whether Louis chose Trotter first or her cooking, and where had Louis “learn[ed] about [Trotter’s] culinary arts,” to which Louis responded “that sounds like one for Russell Cowan [Cowan was Joe’s tutor and secretary], but if you mean cooking, I’ve known it both at her home in Chicago and at my mother’s home in Detroit.”<sup>99</sup> Woodruff inclusion of brackets to let his readership know that Cowan was Louis’s tutor is interesting. Although Cowan was definitely a member of Louis’s camp, he was not known as Louis’s “tutor.” This inclusion by Woodruff, similar to his use of “loquacious,” “diffident,” and “culinary arts,” seems designed to call attention to Louis’s intelligence and reify the old-Negro stereotypes. Woodruff’s framing of his question “is Miss Marva employed as a stenographer as reported?”—discursively—falls back to the familial.

---

<sup>98</sup> Woodruff, “Yes, Sir!,” B4.

<sup>99</sup> Woodruff, “Yes, Sir!,” p. B4.





*Figure 6: Photograph of Marva Trotter that appeared in the Chicago Tribune*

In the early segments of the article, Woodruff referred to Louis's fiancée as Miss Trotter. However, after asking about her cooking and her work, Woodruff then referred to her as "Miss Marva," thereby denying her that sign of respectability of proper address and instead referring to her as one would the southern maid or cook. In addition, the photograph that accompanied the article showed Trotter at a Chicago printing office taken in June. Although respectably dressed, she seems to be "working" at a newspaper office. While the caption to the article does not inform the publishing novice of the type of work Trotter was performing, what is apparent is that she was wearing an apron—more than likely a printer's apron. However, coupled with the discussion of her cooking skills, and the familial reference, discursively the image of Trotter places her as mammy.

The point in the article where Louis regained his focused and stoic qualities of comportment that had been publicly cultivated was when he answered Woodruff's final question,

“Won’t Miss Trotter want you to retire from the prize ring? You’re supposed to have earned \$160,000 in fifteen months, you know.” Under the subheading, “No Idea of Quitting,” Louis responded to his interviewer. Woodruff wrote that “Joe Louis looked at his questioner in surprise, as if the subject never had occurred to him. Louis leaned over and replied earnestly, without the trace of a smile: ‘Why, no, she is marrying a fighter. I expect to keep right on fighting, and she expects me to until I become heavyweight champion. After that we can think about retiring.’” Woodruff then asked Louis if Trotter will “accompany [Louis] on [his] trips to fight scenes?” Again, Louis assumed an authoritative posture and an equalitarian manhood and responded, “Probably not. That’s up to her. Fighting is my business, just like writing is your business. Does your wife always go with you?”<sup>100</sup>

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* attempted to recast both Louis and Trotter in old southern black stereotypes. Instead of situating them as emblems of northern black middle-class masculinity and femininity, the *Tribune* used Louis and Trotter to reify the Uncle Tom and mammy figure, depicting Trotter in an apron and highlighting that she was a good cook and could prepare southern fried chicken. In comparison, the *Atlanta Daily World* attempted to demonstrate that she was an “old-fashioned girl” with modern sensibilities. In “Joe Louis Shows Wisdom in Choice of Mate; Takes Old-Fashioned Girl,” the article stated that Trotter was the “type of girl his public would have wished for him.” Not only was she “old-fashioned,” but she was “sweet, clean, modest, pretty. She has intelligence, poise common sense. She has personality and is the pleasant, friendly type, who makes friends because she is cheerful and kindly.”<sup>101</sup>

Although the article attempted to demonstrate how Trotter “won” Louis, it simultaneously

---

<sup>100</sup> Woodruff, “Yes, Sir!,” B4.

<sup>101</sup> “Joe Louis’ Impending Marriage to Pretty Chicago Girl Stirs Nation: Joe Louis Shows Wisdom in Choice of Mate; Takes Old-Fashioned Girl,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Sept. 13, 1935, 3.

sought to use Trotter and Louis as model African American citizens. Thus the *Daily World*, a southern weekly, employing Trotter and Louis as foils, attempted to demonstrate the rules of courtship. While the article suggested it would discuss how Louis won the heart of Trotter, it was mostly concerned with Trotter's rules of engagement.

Trotter, according to the article, was initially a “young pal to the gang” of Louis and a group of his prize-fighting friends, and based on this relationship—she being the type of girl who had things in common with his friends—Louis and Trotter “became chummy.” As friend, Trotter was able “to get underneath [Louis's] solid exterior” and although she was not one of his primary girlfriends, she was his “Chicago girl friend.” She remained level-headed when it was rumored he was going to marry another woman, knowing that he had always remained in contact with her. Plus, he even went to her house to sample her cooking, and she met his mother in Detroit. Thus, “whether she was the main sweetheart of Joe or not, she was a good friend to him and the two families had established contact.”<sup>102</sup>

As Lisa B. Thompson points out, “the idea of being both black and lady is a dichotomy” that haunted uplift activist in the twentieth century and beyond. The “colored lady,” a member of the Talented Tenth, embodied “bourgeois respectability.” And, according to Anna Julia Cooper, the colored lady was to be a “Christian mother,” “intelligent wife,” and an “earnest, virtuous” helpmate to her husband.<sup>103</sup> This image of the black lady, although respectable and admirable, was not demonstrative of the self-made citizen the black press was trying to cultivate. The *Atlanta Daily World*, and its fellow black presses, used the image of the black lady—a counter to mammy and sapphire—and imbibed her with class consciousness and a Washingtonian

---

<sup>102</sup> “Joe Louis’ Impending Marriage,” 3.

<sup>103</sup> Lisa B. Thompson, *Beyond the Black Lady: Sexuality and the New African American Middle Class* (Urbana, 2009), 6.

philosophy—thus, creating, perhaps, a more practical model of womanhood, that of the working-class, old-fashioned, Christian girl for their readership. Victoria W. Wolcott has argued,

working-class women stressed family survival and individual self-respect more than the public propriety encouraged by uplift ideologues. Female uplift ideologues, more concerned about a public appearance of respectability, attempted to police these behaviors, which they believed would undermine the effort to uplift the race. Reformers simultaneously defined their own class status by constructing working-class and poor African Americans as less ‘respectable.’<sup>104</sup>

Wolcott contends that although uplift agents tried to “instill bourgeois respectability” in blacks who had recently migrated from the South, there was resistance. And, according to Wolcott, despite resistance, “middle-class elites” were able to recognize that the values that they attempted to instill into recent migrants “resonated strongly with the preexisting values of poorer African American women. Respectability, therefore, reflected more than simply bourgeois Victorian ideology; it was a foundation of African American women’s survival strategies and self-definition irrespective of class.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, Trotter was an amalgam of both modern and old-fashioned sensibilities. The *Daily World* article stated that Trotter was “much too modest to express any opinion as to how she ‘won’ the great prize fighter,” thus attributing a tenet of womanhood to her. Yet, Trotter’s friends “suggest that Joe fell in love with her because of her ‘normal’ treatment of him . . . she did not fuss over him and seek him.” When it came to disagreements, “she put her foot down and matched her will against the Bomber’s famed stubbornness. This was a bit different from what Joe was getting from other people.”<sup>106</sup> Trotter’s ability to win Louis’s heart, the article suggested, had to do with her treating him more like an equal than a “helpmate” and being level-headed and independent.

---

<sup>104</sup> Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 7.

<sup>105</sup> Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 7.

<sup>106</sup> “Joe Louis’ Impending Marriage,” 3.

Following her marriage to Louis in 1935, Marva's relationship with the black press was somewhat contentious. From the moment that their engagement was announced, the black press photographed Marva's every move. The September 14, 1935 *Defender*'s page one skybox displayed a row of headshots of Marva in several poses. The caption underneath the skybox provided analysis of Marva's "mood," which ranged from "pensive" to "happy."<sup>107</sup> The *Defender* relished in the fact that it was the first black weekly to announce Louis's engagement and to have published photographs of the future Mrs. Louis. According to Margolick, after the wedding "Marva's every comment, activity, garment, purchase and ailment was followed, analyzed, and assessed."<sup>108</sup> Marva did exude a certain style and middle-class decorum in her dress and behavior. She was often featured on the society page, and the paper would discuss her latest dress purchase. Marva was so admired for her sense of style, and her embodiment of middle-class values that the *Defender* cashed in on her celebrity and gave her a fashion column in the weekly.

After Louis married Marva Trotter in 1935, she also was featured in the black weeklies wearing furs and elegant dresses and attending society functions. The consumption of these products, and the middle-class personification of Joe Louis, allowed the black middle class to, at least vicariously, present an image to the larger society that they, too, were professionals and economically self-sustaining. Yet, after her marriage, when Marva was photographed with Louis, she assumed the traditional female role. If they were in a domestic space, Marva was seen serving him his dinner. Candid shots in public would reveal them together, but she was always a step or two behind. As the accessory to complement Louis's manhood outside the ring, Marva was perfect. Louis's marriage to Marva and their consumption of material goods only solidified

---

<sup>107</sup> "A Study in Pictures of the Girl Joe Louis will Wed After Fight," *Chicago Defender*, September 14, 1935.

<sup>108</sup> Margolick, *Beyond Glory*, 113–14.

their black middle-class status. However, when it came to Louis as a “boxer,” the black press, and by extension black society, was less tolerant of Marva. When Louis married Marva, boxing fans and experts were concerned that she would interfere with his concentration and stamina. Indeed, when Louis lost his first fight to Max Schmeling in 1936, some of the blame went to Marva. The night of the fight, Marva, already upset after witnessing her husband’s defeat, arrived at her hotel and was greeted by a crowd of angry fans. As she stepped out of her vehicle, she was met with jeers.

These were not isolated sentiments. A few of the readers polled by the *Amsterdam-Star News* believed she was responsible for his loss. Two women interviewed after the fight echoed the other’s sentiment by questioning if Louis should have ever gotten married. Madeline Taylor stated that “marriage takes a whole lot out of a man. And Joe Louis needed all his energy.”<sup>109</sup> Marva had been at Louis’s training camp while he was preparing for Schmeling, and Louis’s managers asked her to leave, believing that too much sex would restrict his boxing performance. However, even after Marva left Lakewood, Louis became preoccupied with “pretty visitors,” although these liaisons were never reported by the press. Thus, in 1941, when Dan Burley attacked Marva for being responsible for Louis being drafted into the army and thus, possibly, prematurely ending his boxing career and his heavy-weight title, his attack came as no surprise. Marva was not only seen as a hindrance and an intruder when it came to Louis inside the ring, she was also seen as a villain impeding racial progress. Because of her, blacks witnessed yet another one of their own being beaten by a white man—literally and metaphorically. Similarly, Solomon was also vilified, but not to the degree as Trotter. When Owens kept losing heats after

---

<sup>109</sup> “Why Louis Lost,” Editorial, Madeline Taylor, *Amsterdam-Star News*, June 27, 1936.

his marriage to Solomon, the press took note by writing, “I TELL YOU WHAT LOVE WILL DO.”<sup>110</sup>

According to Catano, the myths of respectability and of self-making have “reproduce[d] and maintain[ed] masculinity by entangling it in narratives of economic and family life.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed, women—mothers, girlfriends, and wives—allowed for the reimagining and the remaking of masculinity. Wives and mothers allowed for the contained public demonstration of the private and allowed for the modeling of what was deemed appropriate parenting and courtship.

---

<sup>110</sup> Margolick, 190; Julia Bumbry Jones, “Talk O’Town: Breezy Comment on Current Happenings,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 27, 1935, 9.

<sup>111</sup> Catano, *Ragged Dicks*, 6.

## Chapter 4: *Ebony* and *Our World*: Manliness Made in Flight

The cold, “raw northeast wind off of Lake Michigan,” had taken some Illinoisans by surprise. Maybe they had not anticipated it being this cold on a Saturday night in the late fall in Chicago, or maybe they were just too excited to care. A majority of people had come prepared to Soldiers’ Field on the evening of October 28, 1944, with “blankets, shawls and fur coats.” Many of the 700,000 ticket holders began lining up early on that Saturday afternoon to get the best seats at a stadium that could only seat 84,000. Although 100,000 spectators were admitted, the remaining unseated 16,000 stood “in every space not barred by a small army of policemen,” while thousands more waited outside of Soldiers’ Field, huddled around loudspeakers outside of the stadium, anxiously waiting for the 6:30 program to begin. By 7 p. m. the program still had not started, and the throngs of attendees, who were kept in order by the “secret service men, navy intelligence officers, 2,500 city policemen, and 500 park police,” continued to wait “through dull vaudeville acts, patient and tolerant.”<sup>1</sup>

A little before 8 p.m., however, as the flags above the loudspeakers whipped through the wind, either in deference to the cold or to the approaching car, the audience screamed and applauded as the man they had been waiting for finally arrived. His car “entered the south gate of [Soldiers’] field and drove slowly along the cinder track on the west side. As the car neared the north end of the arena and turned up the ramp leading to the speakers’ platform,” the spectators began to quiet as they waited for the president to appear. Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not stand in front of the capacity crowd to deliver his campaign speech, however. Instead,

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Carl Weigman, “more than 700,000 tickets were distributed for the affair, and not more than 100,000 could get inside, there were a great many disappointed and angry Democrats.” Carl Wiegman, “Soldiers’ Field Filled to Brim for F. D. R. Talk: More Tickets than Seats Keep Thousands Out,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 29, 1944, 3; “Sixty Million Jobs or Else . . . This Again?,” *Ebony* Photo—Editorial, *Ebony*, Nov. 1945, 40.



“microphones had been fastened to a long board, and this was placed directly in front of Mr. Roosevelt. He began speaking immediately, without an introduction.”<sup>2</sup>

The presidential election was a little over a week away, and Roosevelt wanted to convince Chicagoans as to why he should be re-elected to a fourth term instead of the Republican nominee, New York Governor Thomas Dewey. He reminded his audience that the reason the country was at war and why elections were held was because of democracy. That night, Roosevelt wanted to talk “about the future of America...[the] land of unlimited opportunity.” He appealed to his audience’s sense of duty and citizenship, and stated that “everything we do is devoted to the most important job before us—winning the war and bringing our men and women home as quickly as possible.” Evoking national pride, he continued “Yes, the American people are prepared to meet the problems of peace in the same bold way that they had met the problems of war.” The reconversion—going back to a peacetime economy—would include men and women returning “to the best place on the face of the earth—they shall come back to a place where all persons, regardless of race, and color, or creed or place of birth, can live in peace and honor and human dignity-free to speak, free to pray as they wish—free from want-and free from fear,” said the President.<sup>3</sup>

Roosevelt reiterated his Economic Bill of Rights, a message he presented the previous January during his Congress of the State of the Union address, stressing that “a new basis of security and prosperity [could] be established for all.” Along with outlining rights of farmers and businessmen, Roosevelt’s Economic Bill of Rights, similar to the Constitution’s Bill of Rights, proposed entitlements that should be available to all citizens, such as “the right of a useful and

---

<sup>2</sup> Wiegman, “Soldiers’ Field Filled to Brim,” 3.

<sup>3</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address at Soldiers’ Field, Chicago, Illinois,” Oct. 28, 1944, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>

remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms in mines of the Nation; the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation; the right to adequate medical care; the right to adequate protection from the economic-fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment; [and,] the right to a good education.”<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt emphasized that the worker and free enterprise were intertwined. One cannot succeed without the other, and that in order for the reconversion to be successful, more jobs would be needed. He “propose[d] that the Government do its part in helping private enterprise to finance expansion of our private industrial plant through normal investment channels,” and that the United States needed to “in-crease demand for [its] industrial and agricultural production at home, but abroad also.” Roosevelt’s had “faith” that private enterprise would be able to provide “sixty million peacetime jobs.” In order for all citizens, “irrespective of race, or creed or color,” to have the opportunity to obtain a job and benefit from the Economic Bill of Rights,” Roosevelt informed his enthusiastic audience that he “believe[d] that the Congress . . . should by law make the [Fair Employment Practice] Committee permanent.”<sup>5</sup> The FEPC, which was established in 1941 with the signing of the Executive Order 8802, prevented discrimination “in war industry and Government employment.”<sup>6</sup>

The black press’s reportage of the speech seized on Roosevelt’s assertion that there should be no racial discrimination in regard to employment practices, the FEPC becoming permanent, and the Economic Bill of Rights. Black journalists believed, based on “the reception F. D. R. . . . received from members of both races, F. D. R.’s victory in the election Tuesday, Nov. 7 is ASSURED.”<sup>7</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s political analyst, John P. Davis, predicted that

---

<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt, “Address at Soldiers’ Field.”

<sup>5</sup> Roosevelt, “Address at Soldiers’ Field.”

<sup>6</sup> Roosevelt, “Address at Soldiers’ Field.”

<sup>7</sup> Ole Nosey, “Everybody Goes When the Wagon Comes,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 4, 1944, 12.

once the ballots are counted, Illinois' electoral votes will be for the Roosevelt/Truman ticket, and "the margin of safety for the Democratic candidates will come from the heavy Negro vote on Chicago's Southside."<sup>8</sup> Roosevelt did win; however, he died three months into his term.

In the inaugural Photo-Editorial, "Sixty Million Jobs or Else...This Again?" *Ebony's* editor reminded readers of President Franklin Roosevelt's promise of 60 million jobs once the war was over and argued for a permanent FEPC. Viewing Roosevelt's speech in Chicago as "his last will and testament to postwar America," the editor of the newly minted black leisure magazine considered "Sixty Million Jobs" the modern-day Emancipation Proclamation because it would "guarantee . . . economic freedom for 130 million Americans." But more importantly, the editorial declared, "for the 13 million darker brothers in this land, 'Sixty Million Jobs' means six million jobs for Negroes—and especially a good-paying job for every one of the million colored servicemen coming back from the wars."<sup>9</sup> *Ebony*, emblemizing the black soldier as the citizen that black America should rally around, endorsed Roosevelt's plan for free enterprise and expansion abroad, because "unless America expands its world trade by lowering tariff barriers to incoming goods and sharing its standard of living with the rest of the world, the promise of 'Sixty Million Jobs' will become but empty words."<sup>10</sup>

Echoing Roosevelt's Chicago's speech, *Ebony* linked free trade with the "one world" ideology prominent in World War II discourse. The United States free trade and one-world policy, as opposed to its previous isolationist or separatist stance, was especially symbolic for African Americans when it came to fair employment and the economy, for it was during the war that many African Americans were freed from menial service jobs and employed in the war

---

<sup>8</sup> John P. Davis, "'Illinois for FDR by 90,000'—Davis," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept. 30, 1944, 1.

<sup>9</sup> "Sixty Million Jobs or Else. . . This Again," *Ebony*, Nov. 1945, 50.

<sup>10</sup> "Sixty Million Jobs or Else," 50.

industries. Further, it demonstrated the principle African Americans operated under during the war and what they believed the United States embraced—"that help to others is help to ourselves." But, without a permanent FEPC as part of the reconversion, the editorialist suggested, the prospects for economic prosperity for African Americans would be headed for a downward spiral. The editor imagined that as members of the "left-outs," African Americans would "jostle one another to grab desperately for the crumbs" and that "bigots" would "stir hate to 'divide and conquer,'" thus tearing down the symbolism of the one-world philosophy that many African Americans had hoped would be embraced at home. This division, ultimately, they projected, would result in the return of the "shirt crowd—whether hooded or not." Yet, it was not just the fear that the Klan would return, or that joblessness would disproportionately affect African Americans that were the main arguing points of the editorial. Indeed, *Ebony* was concerned about the returning black soldier and how he would be valued as a citizen. The editorialist told the story of a nameless, black World War I veteran, whose "billfold contained little else besides his army papers" in 1936 as he traveled by rail from Baltimore to New York City when "railroad cops caught him and beat his face to a pulp." After being beaten, the nameless, faceless soldier "went on—hungry, weary, desperate—down the ties of the Pennsylvania Railroad." The editors rhetorically asked, "Is the Negro Soldier of World War II to go down that road, too?" Reminding African Americans that "Colored GIs scattered over the face of the globe did not fight and die for that," and that they "want to come home to an America that has wiped out 'white supremacy' practices. . . [and]. . . to a United States where a job no longer has a color," *Ebony* positioned the black soldier as representative man. As a symbol of freedom, bravery, labor, strength, and the dutiful citizen, the black soldier would be the image that Cold War magazines such as *Ebony* and *Our World* would use to advance black equality.

Cultural producers John H. Johnson (founder of the Johnson Publishing Company and publisher of *Ebony*) and John P. Davis (publisher of *Our World*) took it upon themselves to imagine, encourage, and model acceptable forms of masculinity through their publications, as well as in their own performed embodiments of masculine ideals. Their respective lifestyle magazines demonstrated behavioral, political, and consumption patterns that they believed were necessary for the race to model in order to be accepted as equal citizens. Although Johnson and Davis never served in the military, the image of the black soldier allowed for a reimagining of black masculinity that these men found to be ideal, and in some ways mirrored their storied lives, or the political, ethical, or racial consciousness they believed black men needed to embrace.

As David Bell and Joanne Hollows have pointed out, cultural producers made their tastes and politics public and by doing so created what Bell and Hollow term a “distinction.” These distinctions imply that certain tastes and behaviors are necessary, essential, and natural to class and racial specificity. Distinctions serve as characteristic and representative of a particular race and class and, as it relates to lifestyle magazines or any public display, tend to present the group as homogenous. This contained display of homogeneity in the Cold War era—uniform people with similar distinctions—was the political tool that cultural producers launched to help African Americans achieve citizenship in post-World War II America.<sup>11</sup> This representation of black America present in each magazine served didactic strategies: it provided and contained images of African American citizenship for white audiences that proved how and why blacks were naturally deserving of equal citizenship since their lifestyle choices and politics were equal to, if not better than, whites. For black audiences, lifestyle magazines modeled “appropriate”

---

<sup>11</sup> David Bell and Joanne Hollows eds., *Historicizing Lifestyles: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s* (Burlington, 2006), 10.

citizenship and gave them the tools necessary to acquire, if not perform, black middle-class sensibilities.

Yet, by making their politics and judgments public, Davis and Johnson produced and encouraged, within the pages of their respective magazine, a democratization—allowing blacks the belief that they had a “voice” in how black America was to (re)presented to the larger public. Recognizing that their primary target audience was the black masses, the publishers initially did not create a class divide within these magazines, which is a criticism launched against them during the 1950s. Indeed, their containment of blackness straddled the working and middle class as they searched for ideal representations of a black aesthetic and black masculinity while they tried to cultivate a readership. And although within these pages they sold “product” that would help emulate class status, they were interested in their readers consuming lifestyle choices that had less to do with material goods and more with ideology.

*Our World* and *Ebony* were emblematic of post-war containment. Both pictorial magazines tried to contain within their pages representations of African American lifestyle, labor, and political issues to demonstrate black citizenship. Similarly, the process of Cold War containment also entailed excluding or ostracizing behaviors or models deemed anti-American. How each publisher chose to manage representations of blackness as a tool of Cold War containment varied, although there was one symbolic black citizen each publisher used as deserving unequivocally of equal citizenship—the black soldier. Prior to World War II, sport icons Joe Louis and Jesse Owens were seen as tools and models to help African Americans gain access to racial equality in the 1930s. After the war, however, the veteran, or the image of the veteran, became emblematic. To be sure, middle-class black masculinity and the self-made man

were still useful forms. However, because of the war, the veteran, as a model for citizenship, was mapped with qualities that each publisher believed were reflective of ideal black masculinity.

### **Johnson and Davis: Performed Embodiment**

Although John Johnson and John Davis were not servicemen, they presented the black soldier as representative man. They mapped on to this re-imagined ideal black man traits they believed would help advance the cause of equal rights.

Johnson's first vivid memory was that of running. In his autobiography, *Succeeding Against the Odds: The Autobiography of a Great American Businessman*, Johnson wrote, "we were running. We were running for our lives, and every living thing around us—man, woman, and child, dog, cat, and chicken, Black and White—was running, too." Recalling the chaos and how he and his mother had to run to safety to escape the treacherous waters that threatened to swallow his town of Arkansas City, Arkansas, when the levees broke during the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, Johnson remembered their escape as "two—a Black boy and a Black woman—against the tide, and battalions of hostile men were arrayed against us."<sup>12</sup> Thus, Johnson's first memory was that of mother and son overcoming obstacles with both the environment and hostile men. Yet, although Johnson saw his and his mother's fate linked, he recognized that "the worst flood in American history [had] more than 800,000 Americans running with us."<sup>13</sup> And, "with the help of Blacks and Whites, who paid no attention to our color, we settled on the island of the levee, where we lived for six weeks."<sup>14</sup> Thus, it was interracial cooperation that helped the race succeed. This opening anecdote from Johnson's memoir set the format and tone for not only how he mapped his autobiography but also his philosophy.

---

<sup>12</sup> John H. Johnson and Lerone Bennet, Jr., *Succeeding Against the Odds: The Autobiography of a Great American Businessman*, (New York, 1992), 28.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 29.

Born Johnny Johnson in Arkansas City to Gertrude Jenkins Johnson Williams, Johnson wrote that “by a quirk of fate, I was born in the last year of World War I, and I founded *Ebony* in the last year of World War II. But my life is defined not by wars but by critical turning points in history.” For Johnson, those critical turning points in history, which some may call obstacles or disadvantages, were, in fact, opportunities. Floods and wars allowed Johnson the opportunity to mark, define, and remake his manhood. Other disadvantages that would subsequently become advantages for Johnson were that Arkansas City did not have a high school for African Americans and the Great Depression. According to Johnson, it was customary for blacks to send their children to boarding school in Pine Bluff or Little Rock, Arkansas, to continue their education, but because of the depression, Johnson’s mother could not afford to do so. Instead, she had her son repeat the eighth grade until she was able to save enough money to move to Chicago in the Summer of 1933. Johnson wrote, “I’ve thanked fate for that gift many times. For if there had been a high school for Blacks in Arkansas City, I would have attended it, and I would not have left for Chicago and [have] a multimillion-dollar empire.”<sup>15</sup> Even in the retelling of this story, Johnson marked his manhood by investing himself with empowerment and self-determination. He, in recounting his life, was the engineer of his destiny. Although he gave his mother credit for being insistent that her son have a better life, and he characterized her as self-sacrificing, which reaffirmed the self-made man trope, his stepfather, who Johnson and his mother lived with in Arkansas City, was reduced to a coward and weakling when he did not believe in Johnson-Williams’s vision and opted to stay in Arkansas, only to follow the Johnsons once they were settled in Chicago.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 49.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 53–54, 72.



The move to Chicago allowed Johnson to fulfill his dream. He attended the predominantly black Wendell Phillips High School, which was the same school that journalist Dan Burley, comedian Redd Foxx, and singer Nat ‘King’ Cole attended. He enrolled in journalism classes there and became “editor in chief of the paper and sales manager of the yearbook.” According to Johnson, he had “been in love with newspapers and newspaper people since [his] first encounter with the *Chicago Defender* in Arkansas City.” When Phillips burned down, Johnson was transferred to the newly built Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable, named after “the Black father of Chicago,” where he would later become involved in the planning of the high school commencement and its only student speaker. This commencement, which would be noted in the *Chicago Defender*, “also marked the birth of John H. Johnson.” Prior to his graduation, Johnson’s “sensitive civic teacher,” Miss Herrick, “pulled him aside and said ‘Johnny, you’re about to graduate. You’re a big boy now. Shouldn’t you be John?’” She then suggested he have a middle name, where, then, Johnson “picked a name out of the air. . . [and] became John Harold Johnson.” Similar to Owens and Louis, who underwent their own name change as part and parcel of their self-making, Johnson participated in the same act of reinvention. To commemorate his new journey into manhood, in his yearbook Johnson’s creative writing class sponsor wrote, “To Johnny. Now that you are John, grown, dignified, alert, intelligent, we are proud of you.”<sup>17</sup>

Along with his renaming, Johnson’s commencement exercises also marked the moment he met one of his “heroes,” Harry H. Pace, president of Supreme Life Insurance, who also spoke during the graduation ceremony. Supreme Life, according to Johnson, was “the biggest Black business in the North and the biggest Black business in Chicago.” Pace, who was light enough to pass for white, probably, in many of ways, reminded Johnson of some of the black businessmen

---

<sup>17</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 65, 62, 64, 81–82.

he met while a youngster in Arkansas City. Johnson described the black doctor who had an “office in the main office building,” and a barbershop owner who operated out of the same building, but it was Paris Frazier, “a levee contractor and carpenter who dominated the building trade and constructed houses for Blacks and Whites,” that Johnson most admired. It was not only that Frazier dominated the contracting trade, that he built the buildings that doctors and barbershop owners occupied, that he built homes for the black and white citizens of Arkansas City, or that he was “the first black in town to own a car, live in a house that was palatial by Arkansas City standards . . . [and have]. . . an indoor toilet, an unheard-of luxury in that day,” but it was the combination of all of these that made Johnson decide that he “wanted a house like [Frazier’s] and a shiny car that kicked up dust in the road and an indoor toilet that flushed.” It was in his observing of these black businessmen that Johnson “noticed the people with money and power wore suits and didn’t sweat or work hard physically.” Based on this observation, Johnson surmised that it was “better to wear a suit and supervise people who worked hard and wore overalls and sweated.”<sup>18</sup> Pace, most likely, was a modern version of Frazier. It was Pace who took the newly remade Johnson under his wing and offered Johnson a job to help him pay for his tuition at the University of Chicago. Johnson’s duties included assisting Pace in compiling the company’s newsletter, and, at Pace’s directive, assisting Earl Dickerson’s bid for city council, and eventually becoming the campaign’s publicity manager.<sup>19</sup> Johnson would drop out of school and work for Supreme fulltime, becoming editor of the *Guardian* and Pace’s pseudo-confidant when Pace was worried that his black employees would reveal to Pace’s white neighbors that Pace was black.

---

<sup>18</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 44, 44–45.

<sup>19</sup> Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago, 2007), 136.

Pace, who would read both the white and black presses to stay current on events, felt he could no longer take the black weeklies home for fear this evidence would surely expose his secret. He asked Johnson “to read magazines and newspapers and prepare a digest of what was happening in the Black world” in order to “talk intelligently about race relations to people who came to his office.”<sup>20</sup> Pace’s disadvantage became Johnson’s advantage when Johnson became the source of information on black America by compiling this digest. Johnson turned his advantage into *Negro Digest*, his first publication. According to Ben Burns, who worked closely with Johnson on many of his publications, “the history of black publishing was strewn with repeated magazine failures. The only survivors in the early 1940s were *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, the organization supported journals of the NAACP and the Urban League.” Thus, when *Negro Digest* appeared in November 1942, it “filled an immense gap on newsstands in black communities.”<sup>21</sup> Both Burns and Adam Green note that *Negro Digest* marked a turning point in black journalism.<sup>22</sup> Whereas, historically, black publications were viewed as polemic and protest organs, *Negro Digest* editorially offered a moderate tone and a plurality of black voices and representations through its reprint of myriad articles from various publications. Burns wrote that *Negro Digest*’s sole aim was to “reprint what was most significant in the white and black media about Negroes, even if the material was unfavorable to the race. As such, it was acceptable even to white southerners, though few had enough interest in race relations to read *Negro Digest*.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the opening editorial for *Negro Digest* read: “*Negro Digest* is dedicated to the development of interracial understanding and the promotion of national unity. It stands unqualifiedly for the winning of the war and the integration of all citizens into the democratic

---

<sup>20</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Ben Burns, *Nitty Gritty: A White Editor in Black Journalism* (Jackson, 1996), 28, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 33–34; Green, *Selling the Race*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 34.

process.”<sup>24</sup> Positioning the magazine as unequivocally American and as a bridge to race relations, *Negro Digest* set the platform and tone for *Ebony*. Still, Johnson, “was often uncomfortable with actual integrationism in his company, even as he consistently advocated it as a general principle,” according to Adam Green. Johnson was a race man. Johnson Publishing’s “largely male management. . . gave the company the frequent feel of a locker room or lodge hall.” And, although Ben Burns, who was white, was influential in helping launch many of the magazines published at Johnson Publishing and had head-editorial responsibilities, when it came to in-house squabbles, Johnson tended to side with his black workers.<sup>25</sup>

John Preston Davis is not a figure who routinely appears in the historiography on the long civil rights movement, the Harlem Renaissance, or black publishers. As a radical civil rights leader, Davis’s active contribution to civil rights history took place during the “forgotten years,” 1930s–1940s, according to his biographer, Hilmar Ludvig Jensen.<sup>26</sup> Still, this absence in the historiography was not the only reason for Davis’s exclusion in the annals of U. S. history. Although Davis “stood shoulder-to-shoulder with . . . black leaders of his generations,” such as A. Philip Randolph, Ralph Bunche, Langston Hughes, and W. E. B. Du Bois, and “played a crucial role in the democratic development of . . . civil rights organizations,” Davis’s contributions have “been neglected even more studiously than the others.” According to Jensen, Davis “was admittedly a sometimes irritating and manipulative character; but what alienated him from historians’ regard had little to do with personal quirks. It was rather based upon his intimate connections to and identification with the left-wing civil rights federation he conceived, assembled, and directed—The National Negro Congress (NNC).” Jensen further argued that

---

<sup>24</sup> Johnson and Bennet, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, 122.

<sup>25</sup> Green, *Selling the Race*, 165.

<sup>26</sup> Hilmar Ludvig Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left: John P. Davis and the National Negro Congress” (Ph. D. diss., Cornell University, 1997), 3.

Davis's association with and sympathy toward the Communist party during the 1930s "effectively excluded him from published accounts of the civil rights struggle in America."

Jensen's hypothesis is debatable; however, what is certain is there remains a dearth of information on John P. Davis, his importance to African American politics, culture, and his black leisure magazine, *Our World*.<sup>27</sup>

Davis was somewhat an enigmatic and ambitious individual who seemingly had varied interests. The limited scholarship that addressed his contributions focused on his role as a leftist or as a member of the NNC, often relegating him to a supportive role and glossing over—if mentioned at all—his contributions to the Harlem and Chicago Renaissances, his vocal critique of the New Deal and the FEPC, his columns in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and his publishing endeavors.<sup>28</sup> Davis, who supposedly "inspired more excitement, energy, and protest at the black grassroots level than any African American since Marcus Garvey," until recently, was a forgotten character whose storied life and varied interests remained unknown and have yet to be addressed in their totality.<sup>29</sup> What is known, however, is that Davis was a strong proponent of African American economic equality and believed that the best way to achieve this would be for blacks and whites to unite under the cause of labor rights.

John Preston Davis was born in 1905 in Louisville, Kentucky, to William and Julia Davis. The family moved to Washington, D. C. where the elder Davis held a "federal civil service clerkship position," and the younger Davis attended Dunbar High School, noted for being a "crucial organizing institution" for the black social elite. The faculty at Dunbar included

---

<sup>27</sup> Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left"; Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, 2012); Joan Redding, "The Dillard Project: The Black Unit of the Louisiana Writers' Project," *Louisiana History* (Winter 1991), 47–62.

<sup>29</sup> Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left," 4.

Ulysses S. G. Bassett and Anna Julia Cooper, and the friends Davis made while a student there included Charles R. Drew, William H. Hastie, Mortimer G. Weaver, and W. Montague Cobb, all of whom would eventually be featured, at least once, in *Our World*. According to Jensen, as an elite institution, Dunbar, “in a time when only a tiny minority of white Americans went on to college, sent a hefty majority of its graduates to Howard [University] and, with the help of Northern scholarships, farther to some of the most prestigious colleges of the Ivy League, including Harvard, Radcliffe... and, Yale.” Davis, following in Dunbar fashion, won a scholarship to Bates College in Maine where he was a member of the debate team.<sup>30</sup> Along with elocution, Davis was also interested in journalism and creative writing. The former won him the honor of being elected editor of his undergraduate newspaper and the recognition of W. E. B. Du Bois, who sent a note “requesting a photograph and information on his background and ‘election to the editorship of the Bates Student’ to be included in a forthcoming issue of the *Crisis* magazine,” and Johnson’s creative writing won him an “honorable mention” in *Opportunity*, although he lost the essay contest to Zora Neale Hurston.<sup>31</sup>

Davis’s interest in writing and literature motivated him to apply to Harvard for graduate school, where he was admitted on scholarship. This honor, according to Jensen, made Davis reach out to Du Bois, as he was “all the more anxious to get some practical experience in journalism this summer.” Admittedly, the timing was perfect since Jessie Fauset, who had been the *Crisis*’s literary editor for seven years, was leaving her position. Davis moved to New York “where he would not only assume [Fauset’s] duties, but would also—since Du Bois was off to the NAACP annual convention for two weeks and then to Europe until October—take over co-editorship of the entire magazine on his third day on the job.” Although he was editor for the

---

<sup>30</sup> Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 45, 63, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 101, 111.

organ of the moderate NAACP, Davis connected socially and creatively with blacks, such as Hurston, Wallace Thurman, and Langston Hughes, who were part of a burgeoning arts movement that critiqued the values and the aesthetics of the black middle class. At this time, Thurman served as managing editor at the *Messenger* and, at *Opportunity*, the organ for the National Urban League, “Charles Johnson, older yet sympathetic to complaints of the young writers, hired Gwendolyn Bennett alongside associate editors Eric Walrond and Countee Cullen and assigned her a regular opinion column.” As Jensen observed, this group of “New Negroes, still in their early twenties. . . controlled three of the most important black magazines in the nation.”<sup>32</sup>

Although these young mavericks had editorial control over the three leading black organs, they were limited in artistic license and controlled and monitored by individuals in managerial positions who held firm to Victorian beliefs and practices. According to Jensen, “Hughes suggested that what the group really needed in order to express itself freely and independently—without interference from old heads, white or Negro—was its own magazine.” Naming themselves the “Niggerati,” this new group of New Negroes published *Fire!!!*, which Alain Locke described as “left-wing literary modernism with a deliberate intent.”<sup>33</sup> Du Bois, having returned from Europe, did not review *Fire!!!* in the *Crisis*. Jensen believed that Du Bois probably felt betrayed by the impetuous Davis, having believed that they shared Du Bois’s Victorian views and “old-fashioned assumptions about the redemptive power of moral propaganda,” based on the “race conscious” articles Davis had written. However, Davis’s growing critique of the black middle class probably had Du Bois believing he had misjudged his protégé. After Davis earned his master’s degree in literature from Harvard, he was unable to

---

<sup>32</sup> Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 153, 157, 160.

<sup>33</sup> Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 161, 162.

“secure employment . . . [or] a solid letter of recommendation or favor” from Du Bois. He worked in an administrative position at Fisk University until he returned to Harvard in 1928 to get a law degree.

Based on the limited information on Davis, he appeared to be cognizant of the privileged position he held as member of the “Talented Tenth,” and critical of the aesthetics, politics, and values of the black middle class. Literally, Davis was focused on the black lower class. The third essay that he submitted for *Opportunity*’s literary contest, “The Overcoat,” demonstrated the dehumanization of the black southern lower class. When Davis worked for “Capital News Service, a Republican Party-funded press that targeted black voters,” and was assigned Herbert Hoover’s campaign, he became acutely aware “that at the supposed height of New Era prosperity, 300,000 African American laborers—one-fifth of all those in industrial production—remained unemployed.”<sup>34</sup> Davis appeared to want to use his position to give voice and recognition to the “submerged tenth,” and the black working poor. According to Jensen,

in a revealing incident, Davis, [Mortimer] Weaver, [William] Hastie, [Ralph] Bunche, and [Charles] Drew took off on an excursion together. . . the[y] . . . brushed within a hair’s breadths of being caught in a fatal auto crash. The only comment . . . from a now anonymous voice in the back seat which matter-of-factly remarked: “Well, that was nearly the end of the hope of the Negro race!” and from that moment on, the group buoyantly referred to itself as The Hope of the Negro Race.<sup>35</sup>

At Harvard, Davis “gravitated to courses taught by Professor Felix Frankfurter, who had a reputation for defending minority rights” and who would later, in 1939, be one of Franklin Roosevelt’s appointees to the Supreme Court. Along with course work, Davis worked with attorneys who represented the Scottsboro case, again recognizing and championing the plight of

---

<sup>34</sup> Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 196; Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 13; Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 236

<sup>35</sup> Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 304.



the black lower class. In 1933, Davis became the “twelfth black graduate of the Harvard Law School since the turn of the century.” This same year, in June, on a whim, he attended the National Recovery Administration (NRA) hearings in Washington, D. C. Davis was “shocked” to learn how “the session had been presumptively orchestrated by business interests,” as well as there being no black organizations present or anyone advocating for the interests of African Americans. Seizing the moment, Davis “fabricated a representative organization on the spot,” the Negro Industrial League (NIL), and “declared himself and his Harvard colleague Robert Weaver its leaders[.]” Davis “requested that the NIL be allowed to testify on behalf of black workers” and “convinced the NRA to credential him as a consumer advocate for black industrial workers.”<sup>36</sup>

During the hearings, Davis advocated for the black laborers who were “excluded from the NRA’s limits on minimum wages and maximum hours.” He and Weaver presented statistics on “wage differentials that were intended to keep blacks in economic servitude.” He commented that this discrimination “would be accentuated by the fact that over four-fifths of colored laborers attached to the cotton textile industry are concentrated in the South—where wages are lowest and hours of service are longest.” Davis posited that “from the very purpose of the minimum wage legislation, it follows that special attention should be given to those workers whose wages are the lowest.” In order for the New Deal to work, Davis argued “the black worker must be dealt with on a parity with his white fellow workers, for to evade that responsibility. . . will establish an unwholesome precedent for codes soon to be submitted here.” Davis was lauded by the black press and other civil right organizations for his advocacy on behalf of the black worker and his criticism of the New Deal. To broaden the NIL scope and attract more support, he and Weaver

---

<sup>36</sup> Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 13, 14; Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 305, 312, 313.

changed the name of the organization to Joint Committee on National Recovery. The name change, however, did not result in financial support: Davis and his wife, Marguerite De Mond, secretary for the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, financed much of the JCNR's efforts, including a series of data collection trips across the South," the findings of which Davis would publish in the black press.<sup>37</sup>

By 1935 Davis, "not yet thirty years old, had emerged as a strong critic of the New Deal's racially biased policies, had become a respected expert on African American workers among unionist, and had established a reputation as a civil rights leader in Washington and across the nation." But not everyone trusted Davis's coalition building or his leftist-leaning tendencies, and felt he held ulterior motives. According to Jensen, Davis's "increasing outspokenness in favor of black self-organization and industrial unionism . . . had convinced some white moderate supporters . . . that he was a self-righteous manipulator . . . a double-crosser who manifested a nuisance value in calling attention to the problem, but is not trusted by anyone." Davis's continued left-wing tendencies alienated him from conservative civil rights groups. Davis asserted that "industrial unionism provided the only recourse for the protection of black workers." He stated that "the interest of Negro labor is now and has always been identical with that of all labor. . . like most workers we know that improvements of our condition can come only through collective action." Thus, in May of that year, Bunche and Davis held a conference at Howard University, called "The Position of the Negro in Our National Economic Crisis." The participants, who ranged from black intellectuals, civil right proponents, and white allies, organized "to take a candid inventory of the position of the Negro in [the] national economic crisis." During the conference, Davis advocated for "a radical restructuring of

---

<sup>37</sup> Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left," 316; Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 14; Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left," 316; and John P. Davis, "Negroes in the South," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Feb. 10, 1934, 10.

American values. He believed a mass movement needed to coalesce that would force the government to shift emphasis from private property to protection of human beings.” The attendees had varying opinions and political interests that ranged from “intraracial cooperative movements, to faith in the New Deal, to a rejection of capitalism.” But, despite their divergent strategies, there was an agreement that an emphasis should be placed on “class and race in order to advance African American interests.” Out of this conference, the “first successful industrial labor movement was formed, the National Negro Congress, whose goal was to “focus on the working class and unify African Americans through coalition” building.<sup>38</sup>

As a leader within the National Negro Congress, Davis worked closely with Roosevelt on New Deal reform policies, traveled extensively and chronicled the plight of the impoverished worker and southern laborer, and wrote articles for the black press on FEPC hearings and discriminatory practices. Jensen wrote that Davis was tirelessly at the forefront of the union drive, addressing scores of meetings and rallies . . . across the East and Midwest and bolstering black-white unity during the massive wave of sit-down strikes among autoworkers, meatpackers, garment workers, longshoremen, hotel workers, domestics, and tobacco pickers.” Jensen further contended that the “NNC’s most effective accomplishment involved the recruitment of tens of thousands of black workers into nonexclusionary CIO unions.” In 1943, Davis resigned from his post at the NNC amid speculation and investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee for possible communist associations. Subsequently, Davis joined the *Pittsburgh Courier* as a journalist and political analyst. He continued to report on New Deal policies, politics, and the plight of black southerners. In his five-part series for the *Courier* during the summer of 1944, “The South Is Ripe for Democracy,” Davis wrote about the effectiveness of

---

<sup>38</sup> Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 14; Jensen, “The Rise of an African American Left,” 507, 498–499; and Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 16, 1, 16, 2.

black organizing in southern states in order to achieve political and economic equality. In 1946, Davis, possibly recognizing the need to expand black representation in African American lifestyle magazines, introduced his black pictorial, *Our World*, to the masses.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Our World and Ebony: Containing Citizenship and Politics***

*Our World: A Pictorial Magazine for the Negro Family* debuted in April 1946, a mere five months after *Ebony*'s debut in November 1945. From the onset, each magazine positioned itself as a "Negro" magazine—written for and published by African Americans, and more specifically, African American men. The masthead of both magazines made it appear that *Our World* and *Ebony* were small scale, if not individual, enterprises. *Ebony*'s listed only three members on its editorial staff: John H. Johnson as editor and publisher, Ben Burns as executive editor, and Jay Jackson as art director. Comparatively, *Our World* appeared to have a smaller staff with John P. Davis listed as publisher and Burt E. Jackson as art director. Such limited staff gave the impression of a self-made, self-directed endeavor. And such limited resources also suggested a tenet of masculinity.

Naming is a political act and the naming of *Ebony* and *Our World* signaled the claim Johnson and Davis wanted to make within the publishing industry as well as to all Americans. Still, as a political act, naming is often contested. Both magazines received letters to the editor praising and admonishing their signaling that *Ebony* and *Our World* were black magazines.

The criticism poured in immediately to Johnson with the choice of *Ebony* as the name for his lifestyle magazine. Readers seemed somewhat confounded, even mystified by the naming—some tried to deconstruct its meaning in order to minimize the politicalization. Beulah Harris

---

<sup>39</sup> Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left," 514; John P. Davis, "The South Is Ripe for Democracy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 27, 1944, 1; Davis, "The South Is Ripe for Democracy," June 3, 1944, 1; and Davis, "The South Is Ripe for Democracy," June 10, 1944, 1.

asked, “Why such a funny name and what does it mean?” Still, for Ms. Harris, the name was a slight infraction compared to the overall value of the magazine. “But [the name] does not keep the magazine from being tops,” she insisted. “*Ebony* is a life, real life magazine that we need, want and have been longing for.”<sup>40</sup> Harris’s emphatic response about *Ebony*, that it is “a life,” can almost be read as it is LIFE, not just a black periodical version of *Life* magazine, but similar to the importance of all magazines, *Ebony* provided life—a proof of existence and importance that black folks and their lives deserved public recognition. The editors responded to Harris’s question by providing a Webster’s Dictionary definition that ebony was a wood found in Asia and Africa, adding the comment that “the most highly prized ebony is black.”<sup>41</sup> Possibly hoping to silence some readers and avoid offending others and thus lose its audience, *Ebony* editors took a passive approach, and indeed less racially divisive, to explain their name choice.

Genevieve Mary Potts, an employee at Central Community House in Columbus, Ohio, became familiar with the magazine when Beulah Guss, the “colored girl’s worker,” brought the magazine to her job. Potts believed a new name was in order because “*Ebony* instantly brings to your mind black. I do not think it good psychology to draw constant attention to race, and that is very definitely true of the word Ebony.” Her criticism of the name stemmed from her desire to have “racial discrimination and [the] color line abolished.” Potts, realizing the strength and succinctness of one-word titles—such as *Life*—offered some suggestions for a new name: “Do you not think that a single word such as ‘Fact,’ ‘Vista,’ ‘Veritas,’ or some such word would be strictly impartial and still would be descriptive.”<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Ebony*, Jan. 1946, 51.

<sup>41</sup> Letters to the Editor, 51.

<sup>42</sup> Letters to the Editor, 51.

Based on published “Letters to the Editor,” there were not many who criticized the naming of the magazine. Still in February 1946 Johnson addressed critics who did not like the name of the periodical, which suggested that Johnson did not publish all the letters that were received. Going somewhat overboard with the double meaning, *Ebony*’s editor began February’s “Backstage,” a section of the magazine in which the editors exposed the behind the scenes working of the publication, by bringing attention to the term “ebony.” First, they reminded their readers that “ebony” was just a term, thus seeking to minimize its political potency. The editor informed *Ebony*’s readers that “Ebony’s really branching out. At Carnegie Hall next month composer Igor Stravinsky’s first popular tune *Ebony Concerto* will be given its initial performance. . . . In Chicago a newly-opened night spot has been named Club Ebony. Ebony’s a hit.”<sup>43</sup> Johnson then became philosophical, telling his readers that “You only take out of a name what you put into it.” Tackling those who disapprove of the title because it means black, Johnson evoked a race consciousness

There’s nothing wrong with black except what whites have done to blacks. As a race, Negroes have much to be proud of. Their achievements stamp black as a color to take pride in. Black is a badge of accomplishment by a people who have stood staunch and steadfast against the worst that is in the white man’s soul and yet lifted their heads high through the centuries. Black heroes who have emerged in history’s pages, despite the Hitler-like efforts to purge them give Negroes a heritage and tradition up to the best of any race. Black is and should be a color of high esteem.<sup>44</sup>

Leaving behind rhetorical devices, Johnson then stated that “*Ebony*’s purpose in life is to mirror the deeds of black men, to help blend racial understanding through mutual admiration of all that

---

<sup>43</sup> Backstage, *Ebony*, Feb. 1946, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Backstage, 1.

is good in both. Ebony is a magazine of, by and for Negroes who are proud of their color. Therefore the name—Ebony.”<sup>45</sup>

Johnson took a stand and infused the term “ebony” with power and history, challenging black critics who felt disempowered and ashamed of the historical legacy of race within the United States, and reminded his white critics of continuing racial inequality. It is in these instances that one gets a sense of Johnson as a race and representative man. He further wrote that “we hope to teach through the medium of Ebony what the word means.”<sup>46</sup> As a racial uplift tool, *Ebony* wanted to embody black citizenship. *Ebony* became the new representative man who modeled and acquainted blacks and whites with the lifestyle, politics, and consciousness of post-war black America. Mrs. P. L. Gilchrist of Chicago, Illinois, also viewed *Ebony* as emblematic of African Americans and used the magazine as a tool of familiarization. Gilchrist, who was “an ardent reader of Ebony,” would “pass it on to all with whom [she came] in contact and find they have never read it.” When she moved “into an interracial project,” and “all of [her] neighbors [were] white,” she used *Ebony* as an intermediary to introduce her family to the new neighbors. She wrote that “Ebony became my best means of acquainting neighbors with colored people. You cannot imagine how much more friendly their attitudes are since having read Ebony.”<sup>47</sup> Mrs. Gilchrist, believing that her white neighbors read the magazine, viewed *Ebony* as vouching for her citizenship. As a “good-will ambassador,” *Ebony*’s intrinsic value extended beyond being a source of “enjoyment” for Gilchrist. *Ebony* was the tool she “pass[ed] along to someone who had never heard of it or even knew Negroes owned so beautifully illustrated a book.”<sup>48</sup> As a

---

<sup>45</sup> Backstage, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Backstage, 1.

<sup>47</sup> “Using Ebony As Envoy,” “Letters to the Editor,” *Ebony*, Feb. 1950, 11.

<sup>48</sup> “Using Ebony As Envoy,” 11.

strategic tool, *Ebony* contained and personified African American citizenship and, as perceived by Gilchrist, allowed her to integrate her neighborhood with some ease.

In the case of *Our World*, it was the subtitle, “A Picture Magazine for the Negro Family,” that drew readers’ attention. Davis received letters stating that his subtitle was a form of discrimination and questioned why he would cater to only “12% of the population.”<sup>49</sup> Donald Parker of Newark wrote a letter declaring that “for the past half century we, some of the people of the United States, have been battling prejudice and discrimination. Why do you practice it? Have you stopped the fight or did you ever participate in it?”<sup>50</sup> Mr. Parker, clearly not viewing *Our World* as a tool for racial advancement or equality but as a spectacle that some would buy out of “curio[sity],” believed he was entitled to representation within *Our World* because of participation in battling racial discrimination, but most importantly as a U.S. citizen.

Davis invited readers to weigh in on the subtitle. In the September 1946 “From Our World’s Readers,” Davis published three letters, all endorsing a name change. Louise Dawson of Indianapolis, prior to reading Mr. Parker’s letter, had not sensed any discrimination in the title but now could see how some could view the subtitle as being discriminatory. She offered a new subtitle, “A Picture Magazine Projecting the Negro and His Family”, because the magazine was “turning the spotlight both literally and figuratively on the Negro and his family just by those gorgeous covers.” Ms. Dawson, slightly missing the point of Mr. Parker’s criticism, did, however, get Davis’s overall political agenda—to focus on African American men. Gloria Wilson viewed the opportunity to voice her opinion of the name of the magazine as an exercise in democracy. She wrote, “in a true democracy the will of the majority prevails so why not appeal to the majority and do your part in helping this country become truly democratic in every

---

<sup>49</sup> From Our Readers, *Our World*, June 1946, 3; From Our Readers, *Our World*, Sept. 1946, 4.

<sup>50</sup> From Our Readers, *Our World*, June 1946, 3.



sense of the word.”<sup>51</sup> And, indeed, Davis did. In 1947, Davis changed the name of his publication from *Our World: A Picture Magazine for the Negro Family* to *Our World: A Picture Magazine for the Whole Family*.<sup>52</sup> Although dismaying to some, it was not surprising that Davis did change the name of his magazine. As a critic of the New Deal who had collaborated in its reform, Davis very much advocated interracial cooperation in the advancement of equality. Marginalizing whites for the sake of black representation would counter his political agenda.

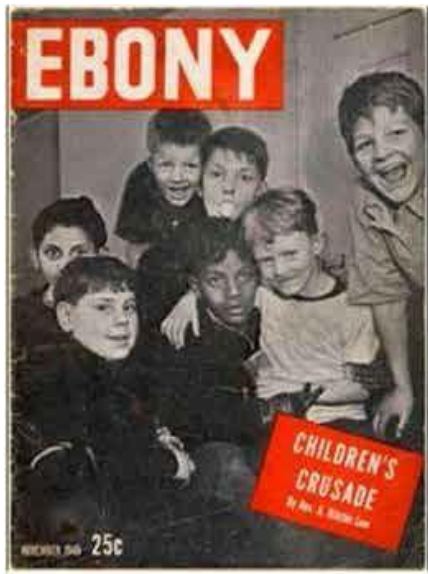
Issues of target audience and purpose of the magazines were discursively disclosed by the first issue of each periodical. *Ebony* had on its inaugural cover a picture of seven young boys, six white and one black, with the young black male in the center of the photo being flanked by presumed playmates. Several of the young white boys were smiling, even hamming-it-up for the camera—or so the impression was given. In the midst of the six young white males was the lone black youth. The black child appeared to be the only one attempting a smile, but not quite completed the task. The purpose of the photo was to promote the article, “Children’s Crusade,” written by Rev. A. Ritchie Low, a piece about racial harmony that suggested successful interracial relations began with children. Indeed, the photo proposed that race or racial disharmony was possibly a result of learned behavior and a consequence of adulthood, and these young boys were unaware of racial discord and only knew fun and male bonding. Thus, the innocence of youth did not recognize race or any other differences—except gender since there were no girls on the cover.

---

<sup>51</sup> From Our Readers, *Our World*, Sept. 1946, 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Our World*, cover matter, Feb. 1947.

The article, “Children’s Crusade,” was a weapon to fight racial discrimination. The first page of the article has two rather large photographs. The first is a picture of seven children, both black and white. More specifically, four white girls, and young boys— two black and one white—were featured, all in swimming suits at a watering hole in Vermont. The caption beneath



the photograph read, “Harlem and Vermont meet at the old swimming hole. Color fades in Rev. A. Ritchie Low’s ... unique experiment to wipe out race hate by bringing Negro kids to Vermont farms for their annual vacation.”<sup>53</sup> In Low’s program, children from Harlem stayed with rural families living on the east coast. Thus, in essence, black youth were, as was *Ebony*, the representatives to introduce white Americans to the work ethic and social sameness of blacks living in urban areas. Johnson would again use the

innocence of childhood to push a liberal agenda and have his readers’ questions the race problem. In the December 1945 *Ebony* feature section of the “Ebony Photo-Editorial,” the editorial entitled, “...And a Child Shall Lead Them,” posited that it would be through association and not segregation that race hate would be eliminated. The editorial argued that bigotry was the real threat to “free enterprise” in post-war America. Since “racism is made, not born,” individuals such as Low “have tackled the job of countering the influence of prejudiced elders who infect their children with the germs of racism.”<sup>54</sup> This editorial, as well as the *Ebony*’s first article, stated that the path toward racial equality would be paved with education and through association.

<sup>53</sup> Ritchie Low, “Children’s Crusade,” *Ebony*, Nov. 1945, 3.

<sup>54</sup> “...And a Child Shall Lead Them,” *Ebony*, Dec. 1945, 28.

The first two issues of *Ebony* informed potential readers of the type of post-war magazine Johnson envisioned and the post-war society he hoped to create. The inaugural issue cover photograph, Low's article, as well as the editorials suggested that a few of the goals of *Ebony*, as a product, were to promote racial equality, and to be the "experiment" where the two races and "color fades" to "wipe out race hate."<sup>55</sup> That, if blacks were "known," racial equality would subsequently become achievable. Johnson viewed his magazine as a medium in which the citizenship of blackness was made transparent. His decision to use the photograph of the seven young boys on the inaugural cover to reflect the politics of the magazine is even more curious. The lone black child on the cover, in a sense, was representative of African American men or a symbol of Johnson. Why did he choose only one black child and not two? As a symbol or token of inclusion, was the lone black child less threatening to potential white readers who were for moderate integration? The cover reflected the liberal philosophy of the postwar era that each man's worth was determined by his own might, and through this might success was achievable. Capturing the core tenets of the self-made man myth, the cover symbolized the hope that if white society knew African American men, whites would see the similarities and overlook the differences and allow black men to benefit not just from FDR's promise of sixty million jobs and free enterprise, but also full inclusion.

As a magazine that was putatively representative of and contained the collective behavior and desires of blacks, one can also view the lone black soul on the cover as representative of a liberal black philosophy, as well as symbolic of the magazine itself and of Johnson's own storied life. In the December "Backstage," Johnson boasted how *Ebony*, even after one issue, surpassed the other leading black magazine, which coincidentally happened to be Johnson's other brainchild,

---

<sup>55</sup> Low, "Children's Crusade," 3.

*Negro Digest*. According to Johnson, the first issue took “the circulation championship among Negro magazines,” and placed it as “the biggest Negro magazine in the world in both size and circulation.” Eager readers who tried to find *Ebony* at the newsstand were disappointed. Johnson apologized that there were not enough magazines, but ceded priority to customers who subscribed to the magazine through the mail. In order not to miss out, he suggested that people get a subscription and consider getting a subscription for someone else as a Christmas gift. Johnson already saw the uniqueness of his latest publishing endeavor, despite the fact that *Ebony* was still in its infancy or, as Johnson put it, “a growing boy.”<sup>56</sup>

## **Modeling and Constructing Black Manhood**

*Ebony* and *Our World* had sections devoted to projecting the editors’ voice. *Ebony*’s “Backstage” and *Our World*’s “To Our Readers,” guised as non-political features of the magazine, as opposed to editorial pages, offered readers access to the inner-workings of the magazines’ publication. These sections of the periodicals were the consciousness or the ego of the magazine. “Backstage” and “To Our Readers” were the spaces of the magazine where the editors positioned themselves/the magazine to the public and informed the readers of the magazine’s exceptionality, its work ethic, and the tastes and values they believed were endemic and representative of African American citizenry. By offering access to the belly of the publication, editors created and invited readers into an intimate space, where they attempted to convince readers that the magazine was worthy of their attention, representation, readership, and loyalty.

*Ebony*’s first “Backstage,” written mostly in the vernacular and jive, detailed the rise of the magazine. Mimicking the self-made story and symbolically reflecting the anticipation and

---

<sup>56</sup> “Backstage,” *Ebony*, Dec. 1945, 2.

thirst of post-war African Americans, “Backstage,” before all else, informed readers of the delays encountered before *Ebony* was actualized. Announcing that “WE’RE OFF!,” the editors informed their prospective readers that “Like a thoroughbred stallion, we’ve been straining at the starting gate for months now waiting for the gun from the almighty, omnipotent, superduber War Production Board.” Eager to put in motion what they had “brain-trusted and blueprinted, rehearsed and dummied over and over again anxiously keeping a weather eye peeled on Washington for the ‘go’ signal,” *Ebony*, similar to many African American males, was anxious to finally get to work and be a producer and represent African American citizenship.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, when the “V-J whistle did blow,” it was unexpected, and *Ebony* was “caught with [their] plans down.” When “the WPB boys suddenly said . . . here’s your paper and scram,” Johnson and his staff found themselves with “tons of slick, shiny stock, a sheaf of dummies but no magazine.” Nevertheless, “this story [has] a happy ending as do all good tales.” Johnson “confide[d] [they] pulled a reconversion act out of an ancient hat with slick style that would put magician Houdini to shame.” After reinventing themselves, *Ebony*—as well as African American men—now, could finally say—“here we are.”<sup>58</sup>

Discursively setting the magazine apart from other black newspapers and periodicals, *Ebony* editors wrote the premier “Backstage” in jargon. Terms, such as “scram,” “talk turkey,” and “swell” situated *Ebony* as a modern, “cool” magazine. In addition, by characterizing themselves as “jolly folks” who seemingly did not let bureaucratic or systemic delays deter them, *Ebony* sought to set itself apart from previous black publications by declaring that they “like to look at the zesty side of life.” This pronouncement was part of a trend started by Johnson

---

<sup>57</sup> “Backstage,” *Ebony*, Nov. 1945, 2.

<sup>58</sup> “Backstage,” 2.

Publishing in which black periodicals were not solely a voice of protest.<sup>59</sup> The post-war New Negro that Johnson seemed to want to create was race conscious, urban, modern, stylish, and cool. Indeed, as Megan E. Williams argued, Johnson “believ[ed] that African Americans ‘needed positive images to fulfill their potential’ and ‘that you have to change images before you can change acts and institution.’”<sup>60</sup> For Johnson the model of black modern citizen, primarily as contained within the pages of his lifestyle magazine, would be the key to changing the institutions. The editors further advanced the distinction by writing:

Sure, you can get all hot and bothered about the race question (and don’t think we don’t) but not enough is said about all the swell things we Negroes can do and will accomplish. *Ebony* will try to mirror the happier side of Negro life—the positive, everyday achievements from Harlem to Hollywood. But when we talk about race as the No. 1 problem of America, we’ll talk turkey.<sup>61</sup>

As stated, in the inaugural “Backstage,” *Ebony*’s editors wanted to carve out their own identity among the black press. Suggesting that other newspapers and magazines focused too much on the negative and had not moved beyond discussing the race problem, *Ebony*, in turn, would focus on the progress of African Americans during the mid-twentieth century. As Ben Burns and Adam Green mentioned in their respective texts, Johnson’s obsession with publishing stories that featured the “first,” the “only,” and the “best” were hallmarks of *Ebony*, even when some of these stories took a turn toward the spectacle. Yet, as Green explained, the coverage of the extra-ordinarity of African Americans served as a tool for racial advancement. The stories that focused on the blind or the physically deformed served as models of overcoming adversity.<sup>62</sup> *Ebony* situated itself as modern by writing that they would focus on “the positive everyday

---

<sup>59</sup> “Backstage,” 2; also see Green, *Selling the Race*, 130; and Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Megan E. Williams, “‘Meet the Real Lena Horne’: Representation of Lena Horne in *Ebony* Magazine, 1945-1949,” *Journal of American Studies* 43(2009), 119.

<sup>61</sup> “Backstage,” 2.

<sup>62</sup> Green, *Selling the Race*, 141; and Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 94.

achievements from Harlem to Hollywood.” With the understanding that “from Harlem to Hollywood” was an exercise in alliteration, the naming of these metropolitan areas also spoke to the modern, urban, and more sophisticated spaces that blacks now occupied. Still, the editors wanted their audience to know that they were not completely blind to the race problem in the United States. So, when they had to “talk about race as the No. 1 problem of America,” they would speak honestly.<sup>63</sup>

Issues of racial authenticity came into play as well, not only about setting *Ebony* apart from other black publications, but also in regard to who owned the magazine—a question that Johnson would have to deal with several times over the years. The use of the word “we” or “we’re,” instead of just plainly writing “the editors,” perhaps allowed readers to make certain assumptions about the editorial staff, as well as the authenticity of a black lifestyle magazine. If readers were supposed to gather that the editors were “jolly folks” by their language, and that the editors would not take setbacks too seriously, then readers most assuredly would have surmised that *Ebony* was a magazine written for black folks by black folks. The fear of outside influences, similar to strategic Cold War containment, had the possibility of jeopardizing the magazine’s and Johnson’s credibility. As Johnson’s sole competitor, Davis capitalized on the rumors that *Ebony*’s content was influenced by a white man. According to Burns, Davis, in an interview with *Los Angeles Tribune*, supposedly said “*Ebony* reads like a white man’s idea of what Negroes want in a publication.” Davis then reportedly claimed that *Ebony* “has a white man high on its staff, one Ben Burns.” Burns was upset by the scornful attack by a one-time fellow leftist, and knew that the purpose was to “arouse black readers.” Burns eventually penned a response to Davis’s attack in “Backstage,” but that was not enough to stop some from believing that *Ebony*

---

<sup>63</sup> “Backstage,” 2.

was a “white-man’s” magazine.<sup>64</sup> Thus, as a Cold War magazine that was to be representative of black masculinity, authenticity and containment were wedded.

*Ebony*’s “Backstage” offered a “sneak peek” into the current issue and provided a glimpse into the upcoming edition to whet the audience’s appetite. In the inaugural issue, the photograph that appeared in “Backstage” was that of Lena Horne “with her shoe half off.” This image of Horne was “not a pitchman’s come-on” as this piece asserted, but a “way of taking [readers] behind the scene to get a peek at one of our coming attractions—a swell story . . . on . . . Phil Moore.”<sup>65</sup> Phil Moore was a songwriter. His song, “I’m Gonna See My Baby,” was popular among black soldiers and contained the verse “shoo, shoo, baby” that was supposedly inspired by Horne.<sup>66</sup> The following month, the article “Meet Mr. Moore: Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley Find Phil Formidable as Pianist-Composer” mentioned little about Horne. Horne’s purpose and presence in promoting the story, apparently, was to draw attention and significance to Moore. Still, the article did include two candid photographs of the songwriter with Horne to substantiate their working relationship and friendship. The use of Horne to sell black lifestyle magazines during the 1940s and 1950s was common. As a popular pin-up girl during the war for black soldiers, Horne served as a source of racial pride and inspiration on the battlefield and on the homefront, reminding soldiers, and later veterans, to continue the fight for equality and freedom. As a Hollywood starlet, she, as well as other black female celebrities such as Hazel Scott, Dorothy Dandridge, and Eartha Kitt, reflected a shift in post-war representations of respectable modern black femininity that allowed for independence and labor, and a now-contained black sexuality, while still adhering to her role as nurturer. Whereas *Ebony* choose to

---

<sup>64</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 130.

<sup>65</sup> “Backstage,” 2.

<sup>66</sup> “Backstage,” 2.



use the teaser of Horne to promote Moore and waited until March 1946 to feature Horne on its cover, *Our World* chose to use the image of Horne for its inaugural issue, which appeared in April.

Similar to *Ebony*'s "Backstage," the "To Our Readers" section of *Our World* attempted to define its role and place among black publications. Whereas *Ebony* was nonspecific in what it would discuss and left room for racial ambiguity in regards to the editorial staff, *Our World: A Picture Magazine for the Negro Family* was quite explicit in the title of the magazine and in its introduction to its audience. However, instead of positioning itself against the black press, *Our World* seemed mostly concerned with making a distinction vis-a-vis *Ebony*. In their introduction, *Our World* actually over-explained how it was different, while simultaneously taking *Ebony* to task. The editors wrote:

The first issue of Our World will show you better than words what it seeks to accomplish. Here is a monthly planned to meet the hunger of every age group in the average Negro urban family for a magazine of **their own**, telling the story of Negro progress in business, theatre, science, religion, art, sports. Serving as an institution for better Negro family life through articles and departments on child care, food, beauty, homemaking, Negro history, social problems. Here is a magazine sensing a deep responsibility to serve a million Negro veterans and three million Negro teen-agers through articles and departments planned for them and conducted by them. Here is a magazine filled with pictures, with timely and accurate reporting on Negro life, and chuck full of entertainment and boundless humor. Because what is good for the Negro family is good for all America, we believe Our World will enjoy a broad readership among all fair-minded Americans.<sup>67</sup>

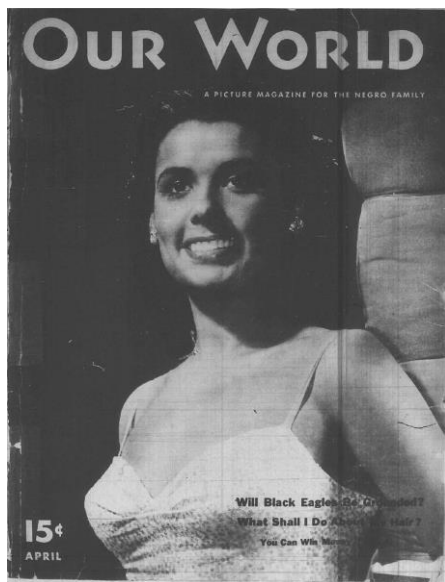
*Our World* assumed a responsibility to teach and model appropriate urban black behavior for African Americans. The ideal black family, according to *Our World*, must be the model family. Topics such as child care, food, beauty, and homemaking were certainly gendered and pertained to women and the private sphere. History and social problems were less gendered. However,

---

<sup>67</sup> "To Our Readers," *Our World: Picture Magazine for the Negro Family*, April 1946, 2. (Emphasis in the original.)

when it came to public intellectualism and conversing knowledgeably about issues that affected black people, these topics were relegated to the public sphere which was gendered male. Both magazines explicitly stated in their inaugural introductions their target audience and metaphorically positioned themselves as the ideal black male, thereby discursively modeling the behavior, taste, and consciousness that African Americans—or African American men—needed to embody in order to attain citizenship rights. *Ebony* gestured toward the “dutiful citizen.”

As *Ebony* waited for the go-ahead from the War Production Board, no matter the inconvenience and delay in production of the magazine, the publication/editorial board also believed that the ideal African American citizen should act similarly by conforming to the



demands and tastes of the post-war society. *Our World*, conversely, took the position that what was good and uplifted blacks would certainly uplift all United States citizens. Hence, all “fair-minded Americans” should be supportive and support the magazine. *Our World*, in some ways, was more explicit in modeling and stating what it deemed appropriate citizenship and the government’s role in helping produce that citizen. During their first few months,

both magazines seemed very much undecided about how they would use photojournalism to show the real black America. *Our World* explicitly carved out a niche market for “tan yanks,” although *Ebony* also used veterans to advance citizenship rights. But in *Our World*, the role of the black soldier was intrinsically attached to an urban, working-class status. Indeed, the first issue of *Our World* was aimed directly at returning veterans with its front cover featuring the famous wartime black pin-up, Lena Horne. As white soldiers kept photographs of Rosalind

Russell and others close to remind them of what they were fighting for, the image of Horne also gave black soldiers will and reason. Thus, the photo of Horne on the cover, who would subsequently grace the cover of *Our World* and *Ebony* many more times until she was dethroned by Eartha Kitt and Dorothy Dandridge, was a reminder to veterans. Further, as a starlet, she was the epitome of black femininity: she was beautiful, fragile, and the bearer of his children—future generations—or the nation. And that was a soldier's duty, to protect the current generation in order to have future generations.

### **Veteran as Race Man**

Neither Johnson nor Davis served in the military. However, similar to most African Americans, both saw the black soldier as a symbol and representative of racial equality. In their respective organs, Johnson and Davis mapped their own version of black comportment, consciousness, politics, and taste onto the soldier as a way to model ideal black masculinity and advocate for equal citizenship.

*Our World* initially branded itself as a magazine for veterans. Each issue regularly featured “exclusive picture stories” on veterans and also included useful information specific for veterans that would help them adjust to civilian life or navigate bureaucratic systems. In fact, Davis, “wishing to be of **real** service to Negro ex-servicemen and women[,] has had prepared for them **Our World's Manual for Negro Veterans**, an illustrated booklet which not only gives facts a veteran will need about veterans legislation but, tell also the complete story of the Negro's contribution to World War II.”<sup>68</sup> For five cents, which covered handling, veterans would submit their request to *Our World's* veterans editor. “Facts for Negro Veterans” appeared regularly during the first year of the magazine. This feature instructed veterans on how to attain

---

<sup>68</sup> “Facts for Negro Veterans,” *Our World*, April 1946, 6. (Emphasis in the original.)

benefits for which they were entitled. The first “Facts for Negro Veterans” informed former soldiers about National Service Life Insurance. Providing instructions on how to apply and keep the insurance, *Our World* underscored the exceptionality of the black veteran, writing that the insurance “is one of your most valuable assets after your discharge. It is the cheapest and best life insurance obtainable. It is the kind of insurance that countless Negroes, in hundreds of communities, cannot obtain at any price. It is not only protection for your family, it is protection for yourself.” Appealing to the soldiers’ understanding that he was the protector of the country, and as a black man, protector of his family, Davis encouraged veterans to take advantage of this benefit. In addition, National Service offered another benefit for the black male soldier—the veteran could borrow from it if necessary. This entitlement could serve as compensation if the black male soldier was unemployed or needed money to help subsidize his low income. The picture that accompanied the service announcement was a candid, unstaged photograph of a group of male soldiers, some in uniform, but many of them bare-chested. The photo exuded testosterone, virility, and power given that there were so many black male bodies confined to such a small image. The image stressed the pride, citizenship, brotherhood, and exceptionality of the black soldier, and signified the value of black male bodies as a military asset to the war. Thus, for Davis and *Our World*, National Service Life Insurance, a benefit supposedly issued by the government, served as a tool of uplift for African American men. Davis encouraged black veterans to apply because they “risked their life for to get it”<sup>69</sup> “Burial Rights for Veterans” also made the appeal to veterans as providers and citizens. Burial rights in any national cemetery was an entitlement under the GI Bill of Rights. Veterans that were honorably discharged and had not committed a felony had this entitlement, along with their wives, “minor children or adult

---

<sup>69</sup> “Facts for Negro Veterans,” *Our World*, June 1946, 30.

daughters, if they be unmarried, widowed, or divorced, and provided that grave space is available.” The announcement informed the veteran of other end-of-life entitlements that the government would pay for to support its citizens.<sup>70</sup>

Articles and editorials about veterans printed in the first few issues of each magazine used the Second World War as a marker to gauge the progress of African Americans, and used the black pilot as a strategic tool to represent black masculinity, the tenets of citizenship, and as a symbolic platform through which all African Americans could demand equal treatment. In February 1946, *Ebony* addressed the relationship between African Americans, aviation, freedom, and citizenship in their “Ebony Photo—Editorial,” a regular segment of the magazine where the editors voiced their political opinions to their readers. In “History Is Made in Flight,” *Ebony* was concerned with the role African Americans would have in the aviation industry now that the “99<sup>th</sup> fliers [were] back home.”<sup>71</sup> *Ebony* editors used the opportune moment of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “Negro History Week” to compare the freedoms denied African Americans in slavery and the history and culture slaveholders distorted to impart a colonized mind to black pilots being denied the opportunity to work in the commercial airline industry.

*Ebony*’s editor wrote that African Americans “have come a long way in reclaiming one of the most treasured possessions robbed from them when they were branded slaves and shipped to America. The slavers stripped their victims of more than freedom. They took away their history, too.” The reclamation of a historical past has allowed Black men to know that although he was “once a slave . . . he [once] was a master [and] . . . this undisputed evidence [has come] to give the Negro his rightful place in the story of mankind.” The modern, educated black male, the editors pointed out “knows that when primitive whites wandered the woods of darkest Europe, a

---

<sup>70</sup> “Our World’s Veterans: More Facts for Vets,” *Our World*, July 1946, 18.

<sup>71</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” Ebony Photo—Editorial, *Ebony*, Feb. 1946, 44.

black civilization already flourished.” Thus, the “callous canard that Negroes have no history,” would no longer be used as an oppressive tool to colonize black minds. The reclaiming of African American history, the writer stated, was a “weapon in the war for modern-day emancipation.” And, “history, like freedom, is the heart and soul of man’s being. . . of his ever-upward climb to new achievements.”<sup>72</sup> This denial of history was what “emasculate[d]” the black man “mentally, to make him intellectually impotent,” the writer argued.<sup>73</sup> The editorial immediately switched focus from the history blacks were attempting to “salvage” from the “Dark Continent” to the contributions African Americans pilots made during World War II.

The men of the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron “wrote history in the skies” the editorial asserted. And similar to the African American historian, who the editor positioned as “some of our best fighters for freedom,” black pilots, literally and symbolically, were the best fighters for freedom for they, too, proved and personified African American citizenry when “in plane-to-plane dog fights, they demonstrated that death [was] color-blind [and] that the men Hitler called “apes” were superior to his Aryans.” The editorial then transitioned from the heroism of the 99<sup>th</sup> Squadron and their superiority to explaining how the black aviator embodied the tenets of masculinity. Black pilots, “like millions of the white youths, were air-minded, hungry for the thrill of flight. They looked to ‘the wild blue yonder’ as the future. . . . in the 99<sup>th</sup> they saw the big opportunity of tomorrow and they grasped at it.”<sup>74</sup> The skies and the frontier were uncharted territory. And just like the settler who ventured west to claim his identity on the new frontier, the skies also offered this promise for the black pilot. However, this search for promise,

---

<sup>72</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

<sup>73</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

<sup>74</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

thrill, and identity that was found in the sky for both white and black pilots was being thwarted for the black pilot because of segregation.

The 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, Tuskegee Airmen who fought in all-black units during the war, had returned home to an “uncertain future,” according to the editorial. The concern was “what role, if any, Negro pilots [would] play in the U. S. Army Air Corps in peacetime.” Without stating the obvious, the answer was clear to the editors that there would not be a need for two separate Air Corps and the all-black divisions would be dismantled, which would mean a loss of jobs for black pilots and civilians. Although “The War Department [was] still training a token number of Negro aviators at Tuskegee Army Air Field,” the other “all-Negro air units at Godman Field, [Kentucky,] . . . seem to be going along on their own momentum but certainly for no other reason,” according to the editorial. It was pointless, *Ebony* opined, to continue with a segregated army “when the entire motif of modern air war is unified, cohesive action.”<sup>75</sup> The editors argued that to deny African Americans pilots jobs during peacetime, after a proven record of success and heroism during the war, was Jim Crow racism. They advocated for the full integration of the air squadrons because “if Negroes are to be accepted as Army pilots in the future, it can only be on the basis of full integration or not at all. Both from military necessity and democratic practice, the Army should take the final step toward making the Negro pilot part of the U. S. Army Air Corp.”<sup>76</sup>

*Ebony*’s editor suggested that “perhaps” the reason the Army was hesitant in giving African American men “full pilot’s status” had to do with the “civilian airlines which. . . enforce[d] a rigid ban against colored pilots.” The writer concurred that the “cockpit complexion” rule by “big air transport companies [had been] justified in saying no Negro was

---

<sup>75</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

<sup>76</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

qualified to fly its big passenger planes,” because of the “bar against Negroes [that] extended all the way from the airfield to training school and indeed no Negro was qualified.” But since the war, the editor argued, “the situation is changed.”<sup>77</sup> Yet, despite their “qualifications,” “proven skill,” and a desire, “like other Air Corp men,” to have a job as a commercial pilot, “the doors are still shut” for African American men based on color. Since the commercial airlines could no longer use skills, qualification, and equitability as reasons to exclude black men from being pilots, *Ebony* informed their readers that the airlines undoubtedly would “use the usual routine about having all the pilots they need,” that African American men lacked the experience, or that “white passengers [would] not fly with a Negro pilot, [would] not ‘risk their lives’ in a plane flown by a colored American,” as the excuses for upholding Jim Crow racism.<sup>78</sup>

These straw-man arguments that the commercial airlines would more than likely propose, *Ebony* insisted, would not work. Addressing and debunking each fallacy, the editor informed readers that although there may not be enough jobs now, “new planes and new pilots are being put on regular runs every day and the complexion of the cockpit crews is still lily white.” *Ebony* agreed that African American pilots did not have the experience of flying “in big transports” airplanes and that their skills were based on “having flown primarily in fighters.” But this argument, too, was weak since “the army . . . had faith in Negro pilots who flew pursuit ships and trained them successfully to man big bombers.” Lastly, the editor addressed the irony that white passengers would not feel comfortable with a black pilot, stating “strange it is that these very same whites, many of them from Dixie, would be willing to trust their country and their lives with Negro pilots who ‘covered up’ thousands of white ground soldiers in the Italian campaign.” Surely, if the government trained and trusted African American pilots to protect

---

<sup>77</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

<sup>78</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.



white America and the country, so should commercial airlines, was the underlying argument *Ebony* posited.<sup>79</sup> “For all their excuses,” *Ebony* chided, “the airlines stand guilty of rank discrimination against returned Negro pilots. These heroes rather than stay in aviation have been forced to turn to humdrum everyday jobs as a means of support.” *Ebony* further proclaimed that “the courageous Negro airmen who made history in flight during World War II will not be downed, however. The thirst for freedom in the air as well as around the earth is unquenchable.”<sup>80</sup>

With “rank discrimination” still in play, the article suggested that history would not repeat itself. History would no longer be distorted, failing to reflect the contributions and heritage of Africans and African Americans. Black airmen, as well as black men in general, were aware of the contributions African Americans made to win the war, and it was this knowledge—this “identi[fication] to greatness” that would propel the men of the 99<sup>th</sup> to “break the back of bigotry in the air.” The editorial ends with the promise, “He cannot be denied his place in history any longer.”<sup>81</sup>

On a meta-scale, the “he” in Johnson’s editorial was not the black pilot, but African American men. The black airman, armed with a sense of his historical importance—knew his “identity” and himself and, thus, was armed to fight for his freedom. As with many of *Ebony*’s editorials, “History Is Made in Flight” was another call-to-arms. It attempted to have its readers—African American readers—identify with the discrimination and unfair treatment of black pilots. Black pilots were black America. Black airmen, similar to many African Americans, had to settle for lesser jobs for which they were qualified or return to “humdrum”

---

<sup>79</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

<sup>80</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

<sup>81</sup> “History Is Made in Flight,” 44.

task once the war was over after experiencing fulfilling jobs during the war. The pilot, having his wings clipped, would be blocked from reaching his full potential, and it was this “pressure” that would cause the black airman, as well as all African Americans, to push for equal freedom, the editorial seemed to be suggesting.

*Our World* marked the progress from World War I in their article, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded.” Like *Ebony*, *Our World* was concerned with employment for returning veterans and war industry employees; however, those who worked in aviation were the ones who received the most attention in the piece. Author James Peck took a subtle approach to charting racial progress in the military since World War I. Writing that “we have covered a lot of sky since the days of Bessie Coleman, the daredevil aviatrix of the twenties,” Peck alluded to the post-WWI era/(error) without conjuring its racial baggage, and instead focused on the long-held relationship between African Americans and aviation.<sup>82</sup>

Peck, hoping to have the relationship continue, wrote about the jobs African Americans had secured within the aviation industry since 1940, such as “a prominent Negro” owning a parachute company, “three aeronautical engineers . . . on the staff at Wright field, the world’s greatest aero research center,” and “one of our most charming girls was a flying instructor in the War Training Service, and was later made director of this particular school.” From owning their own business to important positions in science and technology, the article stressed that because of the war industry, African Americans had gained access to a prestigious and exciting market where they were no longer employed as just janitors and cooks. However, as Peck reminded *Our World*’s readers, “the Army Air Force have afforded nearly 600 pilots and more than 3,800 mechanics and technicians,” and they would need jobs since “there are more qualified vets than

---

<sup>82</sup> James L. H. Peck, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded,” *Our World*, April 1946, 9.

there are jobs at present.” Belying fears that race would trump qualifications, Peck tried to assure readers that although the job prospects were currently slim, the field of aviation was an expanding industry. Training in mechanics or technology was more practical for any man, “regardless of complexion,” and African American men “must prepare. . . for any opportunities.” It was this lack of previous preparation or being inflexible in learning new skills, the article insinuated, that left African Americans unable to find work in technical fields and “caused us to miss many a bus.” According to Peck, African American men “cannot afford to be left on the ground looking up. Aviation is going to be too good a bet[,] too much a part of American business and living for us not to be up there.”<sup>83</sup>

The article gestured toward a working-class sensibility. Acknowledging that there were some exceptional opportunities afforded blacks during the war in the aviation industry, Peck, quoting a National Aeronautic Association spokesperson, wrote, “Aviation is not a business to choose because it is exciting. And no one should enter it because flying is the only thing he knows . . . .He will still have as much more to learn to get an aviation job as he will to find work in some other field that may suit him better.”<sup>84</sup> Although flying an aircraft was exciting and prestigious, those who had training flying airplanes had a limited skill set, and “opportunities for mechanics and technical specialists are far greater than those presently opened to pilots.” Peck encouraged black men, especially those trained in flying during the war, to seek technical and mechanical training due to the limited employment opportunities in aviation. Already gauging the audience, Peck wrote that for African American men, their success in getting a job would “probably depend more upon his appearance, adaptability, and general ability than upon the

---

<sup>83</sup> Peck, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded,” 10.

<sup>84</sup> Peck, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded,” 9–10.

attitude of the employer toward race relations.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, a man would be judged as an individual—based on his personal qualities, which the article articulated. The title of the article, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded,” the accompanying photograph, which had veterans of the Red Tails standing in front of military airplane, and its caption: that this crew had “an aggregate of more than 325 missions over African and Europe,” discursively asked the reader to surmise the future of African American aviation after knowing its rich past. However, after reading the article, the answer to the question the article’s title posited was “no!” assuming African American men diversified their skills.

*Our World*’s article, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded,” appeared to be a response to Johnson’s editorial, “History Is Made in Flight.” Johnson crafted the black pilot as exceptional and deserving, and demanded that black pilots be given the opportunity to continue flying because they had earned the right to full inclusion as aviators because of their service. Davis, however, took an accommodationist approach. *Our World* encouraged blacks to not focus so much on being a pilot, since these jobs were competitive and limited, but instead set their sights on the technical and mechanical aspects of the aviation industry, where blacks were more likely to attain employment. A comparison of these two articles suggests that Davis felt Johnson was providing poor advice to black airmen in counseling them to only focus on being pilots. Indeed, “rank discrimination” was still a fact of life and to demand corporate airlines to immediately change their policies seemed almost lofty. Davis was a strong proponent of black mobilization and “industrial unionism,” and was invested in African Americans having jobs, especially jobs where they could unionize. The black veteran became the perfect example for Davis because the black soldier represented the working-class laborer, upward mobilization, and democracy.

---

<sup>85</sup> Peck, “Will Black Eagles Be Grounded,” 9.

As discussed in previous chapters, Joe Louis was the ideal racial ambassador, and as a former soldier his brand became even more important in regard to group mobilization. In “A Call to Vets,” featured in *Our World*, Louis’s image was used to encourage veterans, “both Negro and white—to organize themselves and see that the United States [kept] the promises she made to us during the war.” United Negro and Allied Veterans of America (UNV), according to the advertisement, was a democratic program that would “fight for the rights of all veterans, and especially the Negro veterans. . .[and]. . . do away with Hitler-ism here at home.” The photograph that accompanied the advertisement was of Sergeant Joe Louis wearing his dress military uniform, and not that of the pugilist, linking Louis to fellow soldiers. What also made this “call to vets” even more personal was Louis’s “signature,” which allowed the advertisement to appear as if it was a personal letter. Louis was given the title, “Honorary National Commander, United Negro and Allied Veterans of America.”<sup>86</sup> *Ebony* mentioned the UNV in their editorial, “The Negro Veteran Tests America” in May 1946. However, the two magazines featured the organization quite differently. *Our World* showcased the UNV on a separate page with a photo of Joe Louis that made it appear like an advertisement for a race-neutral organization for veterans. *Ebony*, on the other hand, because the organization was presented in an editorial, went into more detail as to why the organizing of black veterans was such a necessity in claiming citizenship rights.

In “The Negro Veteran Tests America,” *Ebony*’s editor reminded readers how “one out of ten” black and white men fought to “annihilate the doctrine of racial supremacy . . . [and] . . . make the world safe for democracy.” The interracial cooperation and association abroad also helped, symbolically, defeat Jim Crowism at home, the editorial argued, by dismantling the

---

<sup>86</sup> Joe Louis, “A Call to Vets,” *Our World*, July 1946, 23.

theory of Aryan superiority. But now that the war was over and the veterans had returned to the United States, the editors questioned if the camaraderie forged as black and white soldiers “fac[ed] death together” would last? “Can they drink Bourbon together at home as they drank champagne, schnapps, vodka together overseas? Can they bring back to America some of the democracy for which their buddies gave their lives in far-off places?” the editor rhetorically asked. Suggesting the war was not just an exercise in militarism but an education in what it was like to live as an equal citizen (true democracy) and the benefits of interracial cooperation, the black veteran could mobilize these tools and experiences to fight for democracy in the United States.<sup>87</sup>

The editorial positioned black veterans as changed men, and “not the same Negroes who put on uniforms after Pearl Harbor.” He had come back to the States “staking claim to the citizenship of the country for which he gave his all.” However, the racial barriers that existed prior to Pearl Harbor continued. The “one out of ten” statistic for the army—which insinuated a balance or equality of race—was not the same ratio when it came to hiring and training practices. Entitlements, such as training, GI loans, and support, which was supposed to be administered by the Veterans Administration was of no help to black soldiers in the South and for some in the North. Disenfranchised veterans had sought agency through interracial veteran organizations, such as the “American Veterans Committee and the American Veterans of World War II (AmVets),” both of which “actively campaign against color bans.” The result of this interracial cooperation and association already had some effect—the segregated American Legion chartered a “mix post in Jim Crow Washington.”<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> “The Negro Veteran Tests America,” *Ebony*, May 1946, 40.

<sup>88</sup> “The Negro Veteran Tests America,” 40.

Still, *Ebony* was a stronger proponent of the United Negro and Allied Veterans of America, believing that black veterans needed their own organization instead of joining an existing one. The UNV, as *Our World* also stressed, had white former soldiers in its organization, and was concerned with issues specific to African American ex-servicemen, such as housing, employment, training, and civil rights. Reminding readers, again, of the homecoming of World War I veterans—lynching, beatings, and denial of citizenship rights, *Ebony*'s editor tried to convince not only the veteran, but black America as well, that the goal of the UNV in particular and mobilization and organizing in general was to change the concept “that has marked the treatment of a white GI as first a vet, secondly and incidentally a white man but the Negro servicemen as first a Negro, secondly and incidentally a veteran.” Again, it was the exceptionality of the veteran and his manhood that Johnson was using to argue for black racial equality. And, again, black veterans were not alone in fighting for their “freedom.” “Progressive” white ex-servicemen were also engaged in this war, realizing that a “defeat on this beachhead means a dangerous retreat for all America—white and Negro—from the ramparts of real democracy.”<sup>89</sup>

The July 1946 issue of *Our World* was the issue where Davis made a concerted visual effort to target the black veteran, although the three previous issues of the magazine also had features directed toward black veterans. From the cover that had a headshot of Joe Louis with the wording, “A Call to Vets by Joe Louis,” the image literally begged black veterans to purchase the magazine. A quick glance at the table of contents also confirmed that Davis was making strategic moves to get veterans to buy the magazine. A majority of the picture stories were about veterans, as well as the regular feature, “Our World's Veterans.” The article, “Robeson at

---

<sup>89</sup> “The Negro Veteran Tests America,” 40.

Berchtesgaden,” was written by ex-Private Trezzvant W. Anderson, who handled public relations for the 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion in Berchtesgaden, Germany. Anderson arranged for some soldiers to meet Paul Robeson who was in Germany to sing for the white 44<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade. Anderson and other black soldiers, “men from small farms, little villages, the backwoods, and the rougher alley of the big cities,” were able to meet the singer at the Hotel Berchtesgadenhof. Despite coming from such diverse backgrounds, Anderson contended that combat had made each a “changed man.”<sup>90</sup>

The soldiers meeting with Robeson—a person of prominence who was in Germany to perform for the all-white brigade—also demonstrated the access that the military had provided for these men. When Robeson offered “after the initial greeting and introductions” that the soldiers no longer address him as Mr. Robeson, but “Paul,” Trezzant took this signal to mean that even Robeson recognized their manhood. Robeson treated them as equals by allowing the soldiers to address him by his first name. Robeson informed the men of what to expect when they returned to the United States and how they would “have to face it.” Anderson did not elaborate on exactly what Robeson told the men of the 761<sup>st</sup> who had “turned in a brilliant battle performances during [their] 183 continuous days of combat.” However, it can be assumed that the men should not expect a heroes’ welcome. Anderson continued that after Robeson told them to “face it,” he then

looked over our battle records, and told us the satisfaction which he felt over what we had done over those 183 grueling front line days, and then we really felt like human beings who were a real part of the big scheme of things back at home. Yes, indeed, he made us feel that all those sacrifices, and battle risks, were really worth it.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Trezzant W. Anderson, “Robeson at Berchtesgaden,” *Our World*, July 1946, 18.

<sup>91</sup> Anderson, “Robeson at Berchtesgaden,” 18.



It was Robeson's recognition of the 761<sup>st</sup> contribution to war, Anderson suggested, that made the veterans feel proud and valued regarding their participation in the war. Robeson was the first U.S. civilian the soldiers had had contact with since they left U.S. soil. When Robeson promised to "tell the folks back home" about the 761<sup>st</sup>, this gesture extended the pride the men felt. Robeson, in some ways, stood in place of the U.S., conferring citizenship upon these black soldiers. Robeson's promise to "tell folks" made him an ambassador—not just a racial ambassador speaking for and about black soldiers but a global ambassador. In concluding his account of the day he met Paul Robeson, Anderson recollected, "that night we heard a tall robust Negro sing at Berchtesgaden. It was Paul Robeson! In fact, the entire 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion heard him sing. We had met an American hero and that American hero had met some other American heroes. Everybody was happy."<sup>92</sup> The saccharine conclusion to the anecdote—the recognition of heroes, and that readers would naturally conclude that the 761<sup>st</sup> actually got to see Robeson perform alongside the all-white brigade—reflected African American desire that within the United States black soldiers would automatically be recognized as heroes, and because of their heroism, naturally be deserving of inclusion. However, Anderson wrote that they "heard" Robeson, but did not qualify where they were when they heard him sing. Were they inside the performing center sitting alongside their fellow white soldiers, or elsewhere? And, indeed, the recognition that the soldiers received from Robeson was not extended when they returned to U.S. soil. Anderson's admission that "everybody was happy" seems more of a reflection of the past—of that particular moment—when he was imagining a different America, as many Double-V soldiers did.

---

<sup>92</sup> Anderson, "Robeson at Berchtesgaden," 18.

*Our World* also addressed the disillusionment “Tan Yanks” experienced when they arrived back in the United States. In “Tan Yanks Come Home to Challenge America for Full Democracy in Their Postwar World,” the five-page pictorial article discussed how veterans, upset about their treatment after fighting in the war, organized to acquire rights. Using anecdotes, Davis, in some ways, fashioned veterans as the next generation of race leaders because of how the war shaped them as men—not only having risked their lives, but also having worked alongside whites. The article was about how the 800,000 returning black male and female veterans desired and were entitled to the same opportunities as white veterans. However, the unnamed author, quoting a National Urban League report, chronicled several injustices that confronted returning veterans, including the reluctance to train and hire blacks for peacetime jobs. The most “disheartening,” according to the article, was the disrespect and violence black soldiers encountered upon their return. The article informed *Our World* readers of black veterans being shot or killed by whites, even as they were dressed in the military uniform, of being unjustly accused of crimes, and southern veterans still being denied the right to vote. It was the racial violence and the vote—more so than the basic needs of housing and jobs—that Davis believed were most pressing.

The second subheading of the article, “They Refuse 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Citizenship, Demand Reforms,” discussed how black veterans “are not taking anything lying down.” From forming their own organizations to migrating North, black veterans, the article suggested, were leading the protest to end segregation based on their identity as soldiers. Sergeant Charles Parks, a bronze star recipient, who “fought with a white infantry division,” was adamant he did not experience race discrimination, because “we were all together.” Here, Parks asserted that the conditions of war made race less tantamount than survival. Pondering why black veterans were

engaging in acts of self-determination, Parks thought that “maybe it’s because the boys who came back aren’t afraid to speak up now.” Trying to stave off feelings of regret, Parks acknowledged that “things at home seem to be a little better before,” but “unless things at home change much more, it will seem like all my buddies died in vain.” In order to effect these changes, Parks believed “the Negro vet needs some kind political organization of his own.”<sup>93</sup>

The article argued that there was something exceptional about the black veteran. Albert N. Brooks, “an alert, forward-looking young man of 24, who spent 32 months in Army” seemed to be the model of a future leader, and reminiscent of a younger, politically minded Davis. Brooks’s stance was that “a Negro vet isn’t going to accept his old status. He wants a share in this democracy and intends getting at least a part of it.” Brooks headed the “Veteran’s Civic Organization, a small but vigorous group operating in Charleston, S.C.” Brooks’s organization, “which has plenty of local support,” assisted black vets in navigating governmental bureaucracy and those in financial trouble, but, their major function, and probably most important considering the region of the country, was “to instruct the Negro vet in the importance of voting for in the vote lies the solution to his problems.”<sup>94</sup>

White southerners’ opposition to black voting, although a key problem for the old guard, was met with less pessimism by young black veterans, because of their own experiences working alongside whites and witnessing how their perceptions and attitudes could change—especially the younger ones. The article contented that “thousands of vets like Brooks will fight [for voting rights] with a sound basis for believing the white Southerner’s opposition *can* be changed. These men will remember at least one white buddy. . .who lost his prejudice and became a friend.” The

---

<sup>93</sup> “Tan Yanks Come Home: To Challenge America for Full Democracy in Their Postwar World,” *Our World*, July 1946, 25.

<sup>94</sup> “Tan Yanks Come Home,” 25.

article went on to state, “When Negro vet groups from 25 states recently met in Chicago, a delegation of white Southern vets was present. They said they were there because of a deep and sincere interest in the problems being discussed.”<sup>95</sup>

In their respective magazines, both Davis and Johnson viewed interracial association and cooperation as central to black civil rights. Printed alongside the articles that discussed and lauded the experiences of black GIs were testimonials, guised as articles, from white soldiers who also went through their own reconversion due to the war. George Constable, a former sergeant in the army, told of his experience of working with African American soldiers while stationed at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. Constable viewed his experience of working with blacks as exceptional and enlightening, stating, “I have had the opportunity that so few white people either have. . . or take... to live and work with Negroes.”<sup>96</sup> In his briefly penned article, Constable informed readers that his white friends from back home could not understand why he would work with blacks. Constable responded, “I told them, as I would tell anyone else who wants to know: those men I was associated with were the finest bunch I ever had the good fortune to know. They were intelligent, unpretentious and sensitive men and we all worked together towards one common end.” Serving as a model of how work interactions could extend to social associations, Constable wrote that when he was transferred to a band unit, he and his fellow white musician soldiers “knew the Negro soldiers’ wives and children. We ate chow with them when it was against Army orders to eat with Negro troops. We slept in their barracks, went on dates together and played the same kind of music together.” Constable’s article served as an example of how interracial association could lead to interracial friendships. It even suggested

---

<sup>95</sup> “Tan Yanks Come Home,” 25

<sup>96</sup> George N. Constable, “Our World’s Veterans: A Different Story,” *Our World*, Feb. 1947, 28.

that whites were willing to break the law—or social contracts—once they realized or recognized blacks shared the similar values.<sup>97</sup>

Still, Constable's piece was a bit misleading. Constable began the article by mentioning how he attended Eastern Technical School for Boys in Cleveland, the same school that black athletes Jesse Owens and Dave Albriton attended. Thus, Constable already had some familiarity with blacks. Further, Constable mentioned that he and fellow white soldiers mingled socially with black soldiers and their families in black spaces, suggesting not only interracial solidarity but also balanced friendships. However, what he did not elaborate on was whether the reverse took place: did black soldiers and families had the same access to white spaces?

## **Women Veterans**

Women veterans were treated differently than male veterans within *Ebony* and *Our World*. Their service in the war was acknowledged and appreciated, but it was also gendered. Where male soldiers were portrayed as heroes and sacrificial martyrs for their country, female veterans' contributions tended to revolve around attending to men. Captain Violet Hill, the first "Negro WAC to arrive in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operation" penned an article in the first issue of *Our World*, "Compassionate Leave." The article, instead of chronicling her training, her duties, or her travels abroad, she provided information on her "troubles" in trying to arrange a honeymoon with her new husband who was shipped off to Rome. Hill's flowery story, despite her being pictured in her military uniform, did not destabilize any gender norms. Single women traveling abroad and seeking adventure, similar to men, were disconcerting to many. However, Hill did not speak of adventures as a single woman. Instead, her adventures and disappointments

---

<sup>97</sup> Constable, "Our World's Veterans," 28.

were centered on trying to find exactly where in Rome her husband's outfit was located. Similar to most fairy tales, disruptions and interruptions kept the newlyweds apart, until an omnipotent being—in the form of a colonel in this story—was able to help Hill connect with her husband, and the two were able, finally, to begin their “long delayed honeymoon.”<sup>98</sup>

The propriety of African American WACs was of concern for both magazines. Women in the military seemed to be a bit of a conundrum, testing the limits of gender equality and respectability. Their presence and performance threatened essential gender roles and put masculinity in crisis. Black WACs also rubbed against the prescribed gender roles for women and threatened the cult of respectability during the Cold War era. These black servicewomen sought training, travel, and freedom, and viewed joining the military as a testament to their citizenship. However, once they decided to join, they were “faced with the problem of convincing mothers, fathers, brothers, and friends that they can be ‘soldiers’ without becoming immoral toughs who can curse the chow or a comrade with the facility of a 20-year veteran.”<sup>99</sup> Black women traveling abroad were a concern since many feared that they would not adhere to the codes of respectability if not under the surveillance of black America. *Ebony* and *Our World*, within months of each other, printed stories on female WACs. *Ebony* decided to be direct and address the awful “rumors” and reputation of servicewomen, whereas *Our World* choose not to acknowledge alleged rumors and do a cover story on a young black WAC.

Black female servicewomen overseas, who were not under the watchful eye of patriarchal authority all of the time, found themselves the victims of malicious rumors in regard to their integrity. In “What WAC’s Do about Love,” *Ebony* tried to dispel those nasty rumors about black female servicewomen as sexual deviants. Acknowledging that there were some

---

<sup>98</sup> Violet Hill, “Compassionate Leave,” *Our World*, June 1946, 30.

<sup>99</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” *Ebony*, Aug. 1954, 49.

servicewomen who were “promiscuous,” *Ebony* quelled insinuations about black female hypersexuality by adding that this behavior was “like a few of the women in any community,” and that it was these wayward few that “often succeed[ed] in giving an entire detachment a bad name.”<sup>100</sup>

Reports of black servicewomen’s misconduct seemed to have originated in Japan. According to the article, “bragging soldiers,” returning from overseas with “vivid imaginations,” “started rumors about the immorality of servicewomen that are often pure fabrication.”<sup>101</sup> Rumors such as “WACs who drink to excess and sell their favors to the highest bidder. . . public fights over men in night clubs,” and women who “brag openly that they ‘support’ their lovers—either GI or civilian,” were the charges of immorality being lodged at these women. Protecting the morality of these young black females, *Ebony*, correcting the record, asserted, “most of the Negro WACs at the huge military encampment in Japan stick pretty closely to their own quarters instead of visiting the service clubs which most of the GIs frequent.”<sup>102</sup> Belying any concerns that because they were away from any patriarchal authority that they would lose their minds, *Ebony* showed that black servicewomen actually policed each other because they stuck together. An anonymous WAC confirmed that the women had not loss their sense of respectability by maintaining that “a lot of those guys seem to think we were sent over here to serve as camp followers. . . we don’t go for that stuff. We want them to treat us just the same as they would a girl friend back home.”<sup>103</sup> This quote, which simultaneously allowed for the reinscription of gender roles, also disclosed that it was not the women whose propriety was at risk, but the men,

---

<sup>100</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 49.

<sup>101</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 49.

<sup>102</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 49.

<sup>103</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 49.

who not under the policing of the community, were being sexually aggressive toward black women.

It was the unsupervised black bodies of soldiers that were of concern. And, although the black male soldiers' bodies could be mapped within black magazines as aggressive, virile, and potent, the black servicewoman's body could not. Similar to the screening and policing that happened within black communities to mold respectable citizens, according to *Ebony*, the Army also did "rigid screening of recruits" such as "extensive character references." As a result, "the obvious sex hounds [were] usually screened out." But for those "sex tramps" that passed community's approval and became WACs, "the services collected . . . and got rid of them as soon as they were detected." In addition to "sex tramps," "the WAC and other branches of the women's services have had to deal with members who became unmarried mothers but no more often than the average civilian social worker."<sup>104</sup> "Sex hounds" and "tramps" were viewed as having flawed character that needed to be weeded out and marginalized from society, whereas the naïve young woman who found herself pregnant was eligible for reform.

With the elimination of possible sexual deviancy corrupting unsuspecting respectable black females aside, the five-page pictorial article was focused on promoting a cosmopolitan black female consumer citizen. Acting as the parental authority, *Ebony* assured parents that they "need not be disturbed if their daughters enlist in any of the nine women's services. Incidents which smear the reputation of the majority of the girls in uniform are extremely rare." And the 350 African American black servicewomen who were stationed overseas "have fairly normal love lives which seldom deviate from the routine." What was deemed "routine" at home was not stated, however, codes of respectability dictated, as did the pictures and the text in the article,

---

<sup>104</sup> "What WAC's Do about Love," 54.



that the dating and sexual behaviors policed by parents and the community would remain intact once their daughter enlisted. Indeed, those young women who were trained properly are “bewildered by the absence of hometown restrictions” and remained “tightly bound to them as though they were still at home.”<sup>105</sup>

Untethering the relationship between freedom and sex and normalizing black female sexual behavior, the pictorial article presented the desirability, beauty, consumerism, and cosmopolitanism of black servicewomen. The women “almost as often as they wish. . . put aside khaki skirts and blouses, pretty themselves up for dates with soldiers, civilian men attached to the Army and occasionally foreigners.”<sup>106</sup> Pictures that accompanied the article showed black WACs socializing and on dates with black servicemen, and not with civilians or foreigners. There was even a typical dating prescription for male and female black soldiers that stated that “on the first of the month—GI payday—the WAC gets the deluxe treatment: dinner at an expensive restaurant, corsage and other presents.” Mid-month, “after ‘bingo’ dates have exhausted the soldier’s bankroll, the frugal little WAC pays. It is a tacit agreement—if she wants a date, she foots the bill or at least her share of it.”<sup>107</sup> The WAC was portrayed as a modern woman who had money and resources that she shared with black GIs that allowed them both to be productive consumer citizens. Yet, despite the pictorial evidence that suggested otherwise, “Negro women in uniform find that they are neglected by Negro GIs who are preoccupied with native women.” U.S. civilians stationed overseas or “native civilians” were the men that seemed to be better male companions, because, according to one WAC, “They seem to understand us better. They are more appreciative of our feminine companionship instead of our favors. They

---

<sup>105</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 50.

<sup>106</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 50.

<sup>107</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 51.

are much more fun and not nearly as aggressive as GIs.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, black women, although allowed to “date” Japanese men, as suggested by the article, could not take those dates as overtures to something more serious as could their black male counterparts. A seemingly misplaced caption that accompanied a photograph of a WAC descending stairs to meet a black GI for a date, read, “Dates are not hard to get in Japan where American men outnumber American women. WACs learn less about Japanese than GIs who frequently date native girls.”<sup>109</sup> This caption, playing on the notion that women were the purveyors of race and culture, suggested that because black female servicewomen did not get too attached or romantically involved with “native” men, the race was saved. Black men, on the other hand, could “date” outside of the race. But, again, the article suggested that the soldier’s attraction to “native” women was only a passing fancy. A caption for one of the pictures showed a WAC and a soldier getting married in Europe, it read that “almost 25 per cent of WACs stationed overseas meet soldier they eventually marry.” The two service people, both dressed in military uniforms were shown kneeling with their hands clasped, as they received a blessing from, presumably, a higher-ranking officer, who was also black. Another black soldier, possibly a witness to the ceremony, also has his head bowed at this sacred ceremony. In this “European marriage” ceremony, the bride was not wearing the traditional gown. Although they were in Europe, the military uniform marked them as U.S. citizens—possibly even more so because they were in uniform. If black veterans were the ideal representative men that *Ebony* tried to funnel into civil rights service, then the military couple was just one of the models for the ideal black family.

What black women did learn about the cultures they visited overseas was generally relegated, again, to consumerism and art—markers of middle-class sensibilities—the direction

---

<sup>108</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 49.

<sup>109</sup> “What WAC’s Do about Love,” 51.

Johnson had identified for *Ebony* in the late 1940s. Consumerism and cosmopolitanism were the avenues in which blacks were to attain domestic and world-class citizenship. The pictures showed black women, either dressed in military uniform or conservative attire (one even in a mink coat), attending museums, sightseeing, or shopping. Captions to these images inform readers of how much WACs were envied—either because of their conspicuous consumption or because of their ability to earn their own money, which they saved or sent home to their families. The article only referenced education or trade briefly, mentioning that some WACs took university classes. It was not the political or educated citizen that WACS modeled, but the culturally refined one.

In *Our World*, Davis also used the WAC to construct a type of black woman citizen. Unlike *Ebony*, however, Davis viewed the women's branch of the military as a means of exercising and accessing political and economic freedoms. Gertrude Whitehurst's decision to join the WACs, according to the article, "See Here Private Whitehurst," stemmed from a Whitehurst tradition of exercising citizenship rights even when legally one could not. As lore holds, Elijah Whitehurst, a slave, "walked up to his master," and by the "determined look on his face" the master stated more than asked, "You going to join the Yankee Army, ain't you?" Replying only with, "I reckon," the elder Whitehurst "walked out of the gate not stopping until he came to the Union Army." His granddaughter, Gertrude, with the same determination and the motivation to exercise her citizenship rights, joined the Army, apparently inheriting "her grandfather's restless nature and adventurous spirit."<sup>110</sup>

Davis, aligning Gertrude Whitehurst's thirst for freedom with that of male soldiers, also constructed her as an intelligent, level-headed woman. Unlike the black servicewomen in

---

<sup>110</sup> "See Here Private Whitehurst," *Our World*, April 1955, 8.

*Ebony*'s article, Whitehurst was not seeking cultural exploration, love, or marriage, already having declined the latter because she wanted "a career before marriage," but instead a trade. The ambitious and enterprising Gertrude was described as being self-made and self-determined. After high school, she was employed at the New York Telephone company. She received her bachelor of arts in English from Brooklyn College "while working at the YWCA, giving dramatic readings, heading the young people's society in her church and organizing a motion picture club." Later, Whitehurst "discovered" she had a "good voice." After a few years of voice lessons, "she made her debut at Town Hall in New York in 1948, sang at Carnegie Hall—all this along with her other activities." Davis, then, constructed the Whitehurst as a modern black woman. As a soldier, her demonstration of freedom and citizenship was not through travel and conspicuous consumption, but education and employment. The military allowed Whitehurst to further her exploration of employment choices. She had the opportunity "to learn photography, scientific work, be an X-ray Technician, medical technician, etc."<sup>111</sup>

Although Davis used Whitehurst as a model of black female modernity, she, too, had to adhere to some gender norms and codes of respectability. Despite being twenty-six years old and having matriculated from college, the "roughest part of army life" for her was the "first week of homesickness, strange faces, and a strange bed," but "after four months, Pvt. Whitehurst feels at home in the Army."<sup>112</sup> Indeed, this connection between home and citizenship was an underlying theme to the article. Although lessons of citizenship were taught and modeled in the home, the Army inculcated proper citizenship. In a picture, Whitehurst and several white WACs watch their white Platoon Leader make a bed. The caption read, "Gertrude Whitehurst's mother taught her how to make beds long ago. But she and other trainees had to learn all over again. Platoon

---

<sup>111</sup> "See Here Private Whitehurst," 10.

<sup>112</sup> "See Here Private Whitehurst," 10.

Leader, Pvt. M. Pons shows them the Army way to make a bed.” Not only did Whitehurst have to relearn how to make a bed, she was taught “when and how to salute and developed pride in her platoon and company.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, Whitehurst, going through a reconversion, graduated from being a respectable African American citizen to U.S. citizen, having been taught in an integrated platoon. Whitehurst’s future plans included attending officer training school where she would “serve the U.S. all over the world.” As a properly trained citizen of the United States, Whitehurst could now represent the United States globally.

In his 1971 essay on the importance of the black press, Roland S. Jefferson criticized black lifestyle magazines, such as *Ebony*, *Sepia*, and the now-defunct *Our World*, for being part of an “oppressive value system” that helped to “perpetuate the racist policy of our society.” According to Johnson, “without exception the format of these magazines is identical with Life Magazine of the white press. That there is an attempt to identify with a system bent on keeping black people oppressed is quite evident.” Jefferson’s analysis of black lifestyle magazines was in line with E. Franklin Frazier’s assessment that they were a mark of self hatred. As Gloria Myers and A. V. Margavio stated in their article, “Frazier contended that the black bourgeoisie felt the black masses were responsible for the categorical devaluation of blackness and accordingly felt contempt toward them. This he saw as a displaced group hatred that was, in reality self hatred.” Albeit much of the criticism of *Our World* and *Ebony* is focused on the magazines post-1950s, as this chapter demonstrated, these magazines did not begin as enterprises trumpeting the achievements of the black middle class. Indeed, as a medium of representation of black citizenship, Davis and Johnson experimented with models of ideal black citizenship and masculinity in order to advance the cause of civil rights for all African Americans. Although

---

<sup>113</sup> “See Here Private Whitehurst,” 10.

both men eventually packaged black citizenship as consumer citizenship, at one point, they both viewed the black veteran as the ideal black male citizen. Endowed with qualities and behaviors more aligned with the politics and taste of Johnson and Davis, the black veteran was the representative man and racial ambassador to stand in the gap and prove why African Americans were already worthy of full citizenship.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> Roland S. Jefferson, "The Black Press: Asset or Liability to Black People?" *Journal of the National Medical Association* (Jan. 1971), 30; Gloria Myers and A. V. Margavio, "The Black Bourgeoisie and Reference Group Change: A Content Analysis of *Ebony*," *Qualitative Sociology*, (Winter 1983), 292.

## **Chapter 5: Dan, Duke, and Re/Presenting the New New Negro**

During World War II, black soldiers, who were fighting for victory at home and abroad, viewed their participation in the military and in the war as a way of attacking racial prejudice and social injustices within the United States. Fighting the enemy alongside their white brethren, albeit in a segregated army, black soldiers believed that their status as African Americans, as soldiers, and as men would improve once they returned home. This belief was perpetuated within the black press with the “Double-V Campaign” and possibly further entrenched by their reception by the locals off the mainland where black soldiers and workers were stationed during the war.

However, this was not the case. The elements of citizenship—social, civic, and especially sexual—that black workers and soldiers experienced off the mainland were often challenged and contained upon their return to the United States. While many civil rights activists and cultural producers were doing their best to demonstrate that African Americans were on par with whites when it came to respectability, manliness, bravery, and conspicuous consumption during the Cold War period, the expression of black male sexuality had very little representation until 1957 when the first black girlie magazine, *Duke*, appeared on the newsstands. Whereas *Ebony* attempted to construct and contain a thriving black middle-class masculinity, and *Our World* attempted to represent the experiences of veterans and the working class, *Duke*, the first black male leisure magazine, attempted to give expression to and recodify a black male sexual citizenship during the Civil Rights era.

### **Double V Abroad: Living As a Free Man**

Black workers and soldiers stationed in the territory of Hawaii were in awe of the “racial equality” they experienced on the island which, prior to World War II, claimed to have no “Negro Problem,” since the island had only “approximately 200” blacks residing on it, and

where “‘white’ness was not the natural condition . . . because no ethnic group claimed a majority.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in Hawaii, race was coded differently than on the mainland. Blacks, as well as whites, saw the potential of equality in a place where nationality and not race took precedence. One shipyard worker wrote, possibly to relatives, that “‘I thank God often for letting me experience the occasion to spend a part of my life in a part of the world where one can be respected and live as a free man should.’”<sup>2</sup> Yet, whites were not as “inspired” to see black men living as “men.” One white southerner wrote, “‘Imagine that the South will have some trouble ahead when all these black bastards return. Over here they’re on the equal with everyone and I mean they live highly.’” Another white southerner was more to the point in his feeling regarding how black men were affected by such racial equality: “They are going to overstep their bounds a little too far one of these days and these boys from the South are going to have a little necktie party.”<sup>3</sup> Black soldiers stationed in Sydney, Australia, were forewarned of the race problems they would experience in “white” Australia. However, as one soldier, Private Travis Dixon, wrote, “when we landed in Sydney we found that it was entirely different . . . . We were allowed to go into any place that we thought we could afford. It wasn’t long before the Southern officers had put this place and that place off limits for colored troops.”<sup>4</sup>

In Hawaii, Australia, and undoubtedly other theaters where black soldiers and workers were stationed, white officers attempted to establish Jim Crow standards and protocols that existed in the United States and fueled prejudices and the fear of blacks within these locales. *The London News Chronicle*, “a leading British daily,” published an article “charging that anti-Negro

---

<sup>1</sup> Beth Bailey and David Farber, “The ‘Double-V’ Campaign in World War II Hawaii: African Americans, Racial Ideology, and Federal Power,” *Journal of Social History* (Summer 1993), 818, 819.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey and Farber, “The ‘Double-V’ Campaign,” 820.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey and Farber, “The ‘Double-V’ Campaign,” 820.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder? African American Encounters with White Australia, 1942-1945,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 71(Nov., 2002), 607.



attitudes of white American soldiers had ‘infected’ the British public to such a degree that Negro soldiers ‘now are barred from community life’ in Britain.” John P. Davis reported this change in attitude by Britons toward African American soldiers in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. He informed his readers that black soldiers “no longer have the good will and co-operation of the British public.” He furthered that this particular London daily “expressed regret that such a condition had developed,” and that they were “wholly [sic] unsympathetic to this new development,” acknowledging that “prejudice is a hardy plant and its seeds are easily scattered.” Davis’ reportage of this incident suggested that U.S. bigotry would not be tolerated in London and further action would ensue. He wrote that “the appearance of such an article will probably be followed by questions in Parliament to the Churchill government raising the question of the treatment of Negro troops.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the black press reported that “white Australian soldiers broke up [a] dance and ‘forced all the [Australian] girls to leave the hall’ when the U.S. military police” would not allow black soldiers to attend the event.<sup>6</sup> Stories such as these only reinforced for the black press, and its readers, that the “Double-V” campaign was working, even if it was not stateside.

In Hawaii, public spaces were the sites of many conflicts between African American and white soldiers. On the congested streets it was not uncommon for black servicemen to hear a white soldier demand that the black soldier step off the sidewalk so that a white serviceman could pass. Although a few southern black enlisted men adhered to this racial protocol, black northern enlisted men refused, especially “The Harlem Hellfighters.” The Harlem Hellfighters, or the 369<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (AA) Regiment, were an elite New York National Guard unit and

---

<sup>5</sup> John P. Davis, “U. S. Prejudice ‘Infects’ British—London Daily,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 13, 1944, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Brawley and Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder?,” 619.

“one of the very few all-black regiments” that consisted of enlisted men as well as officers.<sup>7</sup> On a few occasions soldiers from the 369<sup>th</sup> got into altercations with white soldiers who demanded that the black soldiers “get off” the congested streets and punctuated this demand with the word, “nigger.” According to an enlisted man who was with the 369<sup>th</sup>, “a black soldier would punch the man who spoke these words. It didn’t take many punches, but he would make sure the man went down—and down hard.” On at least two occasions, two white soldiers died from these altercations. Bailey and Farber noted that although white southerners attempted to introduce and maintain racist protocol in the Pacific, the difference was that northern black men were willing to physically defend their manhood; not only did black soldiers refuse to “get off the street,” but they also did not tolerate being thought of as less than men. Another difference noted by Bailey and Farber was that the black servicemen charged with killing the two white soldiers were acquitted of all charges, an unthinkable outcome in most regions of the United States. According to Bailey and Farber, “that decision sent a message as powerful as the individual street fights. A black man’s right to self-defense was formally endorsed by the standards of military justice. The 369<sup>th</sup> made sure the word got around. They intended to be treated with respect and they had shown they were able to enforce their wishes.”<sup>8</sup> Further, black soldiers abroad also witnessed and experienced, first hand, what they considered to be racial equality. Thus empowered, they brought back to the mainland knowledge of how governments supported and defended them as citizens, as soldiers, and as men.

Black soldiers not only asserted and demonstrated their manhood through self-defense but through other means as well. Off the mainland and overseas, black soldiers were able to express sexual freedoms that would have been thought of as taboo stateside. While many white

---

<sup>7</sup> Bailey and Farber, “Jim Crow Downunder?,” 821.

<sup>8</sup> Bailey and Farber, “Jim Crow Downunder?,” 829.

female locals believed the stories perpetuated by white Americans that black men were rapists, infected with syphilis, or were “immoral, degenerate, sex maniac[s],” others were sympathetic and even attracted to black servicemen, believing they were “better dancers, more polite, and cleaner.”<sup>9</sup> Black servicemen and workers were surprised by and welcomed the attention of white women, which sometimes resulted in interracial sexual encounters. Black servicemen sent letters to the press and to family members boasting how white women, especially, found them desirable. A collection of sexually explicit short stories printed during World War II also attested to how black men were desired by European women as sexual beings and that black male sexuality and interracial sex were not odious. Stories such as “The Dame Wasn’t Willing,” “Black Draws White (Like Flame Draws a Moth),” and “The Charm School,” to name a few, featured black characters engaged in interracial sex.<sup>10</sup> Although Tania, a Negress, Mako, and Nat were characterized in stereotypical fashion (illiterate, beastly, sex starved, and insatiably desirous of white women), their representation in these short stories that were circulated during the war demonstrated black men expressing and enjoying their sexual manhood. For many of the servicemen who returned stateside after World War II and the Korean War, quite possibly their experiences abroad established a sense of citizenship that was not just solely based on race. As Brawley and Dixon claimed, it was the embodiment and the performance of American citizenship that made black as well as white servicemen desirable to women. “With their accents direct from the Hollywood-dominated movie screens, dress uniforms that even for enlisted men resembled tailored suits, and disposable income,” the differences of race were tempered.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Brawley and Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder?,” 621–22; Bailey and Farber, “The Double-V Campaign,” 827.

<sup>10</sup> “The Dame Wasn’t Willing,” *Use Force, if Necessary*, Rape and Torture series, Oct. 1962, BEM Collection (Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington); “Black Draws White (Like Flame Draws a Moth),” BEM Collection (Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington); “The Charm School,” *Taming a Dame*, Rape and Torture series, Oct. 1962, BEM Collection (Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington).

<sup>11</sup> Brawley and Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder?,” 627–28.

Once black workers and servicemen returned home, however, racialized citizenship took precedence once again. The lack and loss of jobs, along with truncated political, social, and sexual freedom were what awaited returning veterans. And the “readjustment” period that many white southern servicemen who were stationed abroad predicted and fantasized about was underway. The relative sexual freedom that black servicemen had overseas was met with violence stateside. In “‘Reckless Eyeballing’: The Matt Ingram Case and the Denial of African American Sexual Freedom,” Mary Frances Berry discussed the not uncommon predicament of Ingram who, in 1951, was charged with intent to rape a young North Carolinian white girl because he looked at her from 75 feet away. Ingram’s “reckless eyeballing” eventually resulted in him being convicted of assault. And, of course, there was Emmett Till, the fifteen-year-old Chicagoan who was brutally murdered in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Black male sexuality, or the thought of a sexual black male, needed to be contained.

The display and expression of black sexuality, male and female, has had a contentious and divisive documented history within the black press. As Kim T. Gallon observed, the black press during the interwar years “deployed certain journalistic, literary, and artistic genres to represent African American sexuality . . . [and] readers responded to images of sexuality with both pleasure and disgust in letter to the editor.”<sup>12</sup> Sex was marketable, as was gossip, and black newspapers used both to increase their circulation and revenues as discussed in an earlier chapter. The display of black sexuality in black periodicals was not solely for sensationalism and to sell newspapers, however. Many editors believed that it was “important to provide black readers with images that diametrically opposed the white stereotypes that many African

---

<sup>12</sup> Kim T. Gallon, “Between Respectability and Modernity: Black Newspapers and Sexuality, 1925-1940” (Ph.D diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2009), iv.

Americans had grown accustomed to seeing.”<sup>13</sup> Gallon further contended that “journalists and their readers explicitly connected racial advancement with interracial sexual encounters and sprinkled images of interracial relationships throughout papers.” These “discussions of sexuality,” she argued “intersected with blacks’ quest for civil rights and social justice.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Reform, Rehabilitate, and Respectability**

A subtle shift took place within the pages of *Ebony* in 1957. Although still concerned with promoting and modeling conspicuous consumption and middle-class respectability, *Ebony* was now offering practical advice for those who sought counsel regarding respectable behavior and lifestyle. In September, *Ebony* added a new feature to its monthly periodical, an advice column called “Advice for Living.” Each month *Ebony* readers would seek counsel on myriad topics from sexuality, relationships, race relations, religion, class consciousness, segregation, and even the moral implications of nuclear testing. Each dilemma, it seemed, boiled down to one ideological conundrum—how to be a respectable modern black citizen in the racialized 1950s United States. And of its columnists, there was no better advisor than Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Not surprisingly, King’s advice column for *Ebony* was created the same summer that he launched his crusade “to prepare African Americans for entry into mainstream American Culture.” King, during the summer of 1957, traveled to various black churches throughout the country, delivering sermons in a series under the title, “Problems of Personality Integration.” Through his sermons, his advice column, and his subsequent book that would be published the following year, “King merged his Christian asceticism with the imperatives of citizenship as he

---

<sup>13</sup> Gallon, “Between Respectability and Modernity,” 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Gallon, “Between Respectability and Modernity,” 5.

admonished African Americans, ‘be honest enough to admit that our standards do often fall short. . . . [By] improving our standards here and now . . . we will go a long way toward breaking down the arguments of the segregationist.’”<sup>15</sup> In 1957, King had already achieved significant notoriety as a civil rights leader having led the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. By February 1957, he was named president of the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, later known as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Yet King, for many, was more than a race leader. Like entertainers, athletes, public intellectuals, and some politicians, King was able to transgress the racial divide that many grassroots leaders could not seem to penetrate. His appearance on the February 18, 1957 cover of *Time* magazine was a testament to his crossover appeal and curiosity to whites.

The *Time* article stressed King’s role as spiritual reformer and minister and attempted to allay white fears about black racial progress. Focusing on King’s method of reform (nonviolence) and his middle-class sensibility (conservative dress, college educated), the article situated King in opposition to Thurgood Marshall who used legal maneuvers to advance black civil rights. King’s view, as the article suggested, was that blacks needed to prove to whites that they were deserving of civil rights. The article provided anecdotes from King’s personal life to demonstrate that King had practiced what he preached. King related his experience of integrating Crozer. He was “fearful that he might fail to meet white standards. . . [and] worked ceaselessly.” At the seminary, King studied great philosophers, such as “Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Locke, Hegel (whose progress-through-pain theories are still prominent in King’s thinking). Above all, he read and reread everything he could find about India’s Gandhi.”<sup>16</sup> The article concluded by

---

<sup>15</sup> Thaddeus Russell, “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality,” *American Quarterly* 60.1 (2008), 116–117.

<sup>16</sup> “The South: Attack on the Conscience,” *Time*, Feb. 18, 1957, 18.

reassuring *Time*'s readership that King would not purposely excite racial passions. He was aware that progress has been made with the success of the Montgomery bus boycott and knew that when it came to blacks attaining full and equal citizenship more progress was needed. Still, "King is willing to move cautiously rather than excite new passions, especially over school integration. 'If you truly love and respect an opponent,' he says, 'you respect his fears, too.'"<sup>17</sup>

King's appearance in *Time* magazine, as well as his advice column, were ways in which the press helped mediate and negotiate the political and social changes of the Civil Rights movement. King was symbolic of racial and social reform, which undoubtedly caused anxiety for white and black America. According to Richard Lentz, as symbology "King precipitated a different crisis, a crisis of symbols in the American culture, and it was such magnitude that it required reconciling the contradiction of a prophet who, as a reformer, preached a gospel of American idealism and later, as a radical, symbolically turned upon the society that honored him."<sup>18</sup> The "radical" King that Lentz was referring to was the King of the late 1960s who seemingly "turned" on American society by not appealing to the greater good of that society as he had in the 1950s and in 1963 with his "I Have a Dream" speech. The radical King made apparent racial and class disparities—thus undermining and threatening the illusion of attaining the American dream. And, as Lentz asserted, "what King asked of his countrymen in 1963 was limited. He did not challenge the existing social and political order; rather, his words reaffirmed it, as did his crusades against segregation, which violated the American Creed by denying to the black man the political and social rights that were, on the whole, freely available outside the South."<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, what is clear was that King's public image was always codified as a

---

<sup>17</sup> "The South: Attack on the Conscience," 20.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge, 1990), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Lentz, *Symbols*, 2–3.

symbol of reform, not only for whites but blacks as well. Thus, making sense of King's role as reformer was the role of periodicals, and conversely, it was King's public image and representation that signaled reform and rehabilitation was underway.

For African Americans, King's role as minister and racial reformer was not paradoxical or even contradictory. Within African American communities ministers were the political reformers, often preaching the gospel and politics simultaneously from the pulpit. What made King different was that he was recognized culturally and nationally as both a minister and reformer within both the black and white communities. The religious leader and racial reformer offered presumably sacred advice in a secular magazine to middle-class aspiring black Americans. King demonstrated to both black and white Americans that civil rights for blacks should not be viewed as a political threat to the status quo but seen as African Americans conforming to the American Creed—to borrow a phrase from Lentz. Mae Faulkner, of Indianapolis, Indiana, viewed King's advice column in *Ebony* as “profoundly edifying,” and that his “proficiency in a diversity of fields” allowed for him to offer “dynamic answers to such controversial questions.” He approached readers' problems from moral, psychological, and sociological perspectives, aligning himself with the rise of psychoanalysis that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, thus instructing African Americans to base decisions on reason and rationality and not perceptions and emotions. King's blending of moral progressivism and faith with psychoanalytic theory allowed readers, such as Faulkner, to believe that “ignorance is sure to be effaced,” and that African Americans “will converge toward perpetual proximity of our fellow man.”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> “Advice for Living,” Letters to the Editor, *Ebony*, Jan. 1958, 11; Jonathan Engel, *American Therapy: The Rise of Psychotherapy in the United States* (New York, 2008), x.



In the first “Advice for Living” column, King received a letter from a black soldier stationed in Alabama at an army base in a “town [that] is extremely prejudiced.” The soldier wrote that “Negro GIs can go nowhere with their white buddies,” and this situation caused him great bitterness. He asked King, “How can I justify fighting for a democracy that treats me like this?” King responded that it was “unfortunate” and a “contradiction” that men were “called to defend a democracy that denie[d] them the basic and fundamental rights guaranteed by that democracy.” He asked the black GI to “believe. . . that conditions [would] continue to improve,” and informed him that “progress has already been made and progress will continue to be made.” King urged the soldier to not respond to the prejudices he experienced with bitterness, because if he did “the new order which is emerging in America will be nothing but a duplication of the old order.”<sup>21</sup>

There were moments where King’s “sacred” counsel involved secularizing in order to champion racial uplift and black progressivism. “Advice for the Living” allowed King to offer advice and instruct African Americans on modern behavior and sensibilities while maintaining black respectability. Similar to the gossip columns in the black newspapers, it is unknown how factual these stories were—yet, for the purposes of racial uplift, policing behavior, rehabilitating, and endorsing conformity, the legitimacy of the stories was irrelevant. Indeed, these stories served as parables—guides for African Americans on proper demonstrations of citizenship in the late 1950s to secure civil rights. In the December 1957 issue of *Ebony*, a woman, presumably black, wrote to King lamenting her familial problem. She and her husband had seven children, she was currently pregnant, and they lived in a small apartment in Harlem. Although she tried to “reason” with him, her husband believed that God “will put a stop” to them from having more

---

<sup>21</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Sept. 1957, 74.

children and that “birth control [was] sinful.” She asked King, “Is he right?” King responded by first situating birth control as a social and economic imperative and not a moral problem. He stated that “it is incorrect to argue that birth control is sinful. It is a serious mistake to suppose that it is a religious act to allow nature to have its way in the sex life.” He asserted that “in the case of birth control the real question at issue is that between rational control and resort to chance.” Economically and socially, “smaller families [are] desirable, if not necessary,” for urban living, he stated. Living in large cities where there was limited space, as well as the cost of raising children, “preclude[d] such large families as were common a century or so ago.” Without being explicit, King instructed his readers that they needed to forego old sensibilities and behaviors—especially those that may signal a black deviance or lack of conformity—and adjust to their new surroundings. Large families were necessary in the rural south, but in the urban north, they were outdated and reminiscent of controlling stereotypes regarding black sexuality and ignorance. Lastly, King offered one final thought to the inquirer—that she think of herself as more than just a “breeding machine” but as a “responsible mother.” He asserted “that the primary obligation of the woman is that of motherhood, but an intelligent mother wants it to be a responsible motherhood—a motherhood to which she has given her consent, not a motherhood due to impulse and to chance. And this means birth control in some form. All of these factors, seem to me, to make birth control rationally and morally justifiable.”<sup>22</sup>

In his advice, King implored the woman to make the right decisions based on being a mother and not as wife—presumably as wife she would need to obey her husband but as mother she was the ultimate caregiver—sacrificing not just for her children but her family, and by

---

<sup>22</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Dec. 1957, 120.

extension, her black nation. Although marriage allowed for the containment of black sexuality, too many children indicated, presumably, a lack of discipline, irresponsibility, and uncontrolled and unchecked desire. The mother needed to be the bearer of contained black sexuality in order to publicly present and perform the patriarchal model of a respectable, modern black family. When wives wrote in seeking counsel on private matters, however, no matter how dire their situation, King, invariably, encouraged them to support their husbands. In the July 1958, *Ebony*, a woman wrote, “my husband is an alcoholic. He recently started making physical attacks on me. I hate to break up our home, but I can’t stand this brutality.” She wondered if she could do “anything to help him?” King began his response by contextualizing alcoholism as a sickness, “which is as serious as any other organic disease. Consequently, the alcoholic is in need of sympathy and understanding rather than scorn,” he reasoned. King suggested that she have her husband speak to his minister and contact Alcoholics Anonymous, and during his “sober moments,” talk to him about how his brutality is affecting her. King, finally addressing her, stated, “I am sure that the brutality that you are suffering is quite miserable, but if you stay with the situation a little longer, you might contribute to your husband’s rediscovery of himself.”<sup>23</sup>

In his column, there was a distinction in the advice King rendered depending on a woman’s position as a wife versus that of mother, and whether the matter involved the public re/presentation of black manhood, womanhood, and the family. A wife wrote in seeking counsel from King. Her husband, despite repeated promises to stop, was having an affair with a woman in their housing project. She added, “We have children and I don’t believe in divorce, but I cannot and will not share him. What must I do?” King validated her feelings by stating “your unwillingness to share your husband is perfectly natural and normal,” and suggested that she and

---

<sup>23</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, July 1958, 86.

her husband seek counsel from a clergyman or a professional therapist. “In the meantime,” King proposed, “since the other person is so near you might study her and see what she does for your husband that you might not be doing.” King, insinuating that maybe the reason her husband was unfaithful was because she did not perform her wifely duties, asked “do you spend too much time with the children and house and not pay attention to him? Are you careful with your grooming? Do you nag? Do you make him feel important . . . like somebody?” The “process of introspection,” King hoped, would “help” her “hit upon the things that are responsible for [her] husband’s other affair.” Divorce was not recommended “at this point,” instead, she needed to “exhaust every possible resource in [her] power and seek to rectify the situation before making any drastic changes” to her marriage status.<sup>24</sup>

As mother, King advised the writer to question and even disobey her husband’s authority, and take a more active, modern role in maintaining the black family. When it came to wives, King suggested that women perform their wifely duties, and continue to help and stay married to their husbands, even at the risk of physical and emotional harm. In his column, King did not encourage divorce, yet, as he informed one female inquirer who was concerned about remarrying while her ex-husband was still alive, “the Christian Church must. . . give guidance to those individuals who, for various reasons, find it almost impossible to live together.” Divorce, as King suggested to this particular querist, allowed for individuals who choose to remarry, “to profit by the experiences and mistakes of [their] former marriage[s].”<sup>25</sup> Thus, King’s counsel was not solely about moral obligations since he believed that “religion, while remaining true to absolute moral standards, should forever help individuals adjust to the changing problems of life.”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Aug. 1958, 78.

<sup>25</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Jan. 1958, 34.

<sup>26</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Jan. 1958, 34.

Although there seemed to be a distinction in duties between wives and mothers, both roles served to construct, elevate, and preserve the black family, which allowed for the construction and the maintaining of black male heteronormativity.

King received several letters from both men and women inquiring about dating, marriage, and childrearing. The black family played a key role in the acquisition of civil rights because it demonstrated proper gender roles and the containment of values and resources—including sexuality. Still, behaviors and attitudes that were considered “modern” and that betrayed black cultural beliefs, old southern values, or the enterprise of racial equality were contested. A young man wrote in asking advice on love and marriage. His dilemma was that he was in love with a young woman who was “obviously unsuitable,” and he knew another girl “who want[ed] to marry.” The “latter girl,” according to the young man, “would be perfect.” They shared the same background, the same tastes and . . . enjoy[ed] the same things,” but he did not love her. He wondered if he should marry the young woman who was obviously suitable—based on similar values and background—and questioned if “romantic love, which is at best transitory, a slippery slope to bet your future on.” Similar to Joe Louis and Jesse Owens who needed to be properly “yoked” with women who would help them model black respectability regardless of love and attraction, this young man, too, was faced with the same decision. King did not agree that romantic love was transitory, but that it could be “an enduring love which [could] grow with the years.” However, he thought it “quite risky to base a marriage purely on so-called romantic love without taking other basic factors into account.” These factors were shared values, tastes, and behaviors. King advised the young man to “continue to associate” with the woman with whom he shared a similar background and values, for “it was probable” that he would “grow to love

her,” and, in turn, his feelings of romantic love for the “obviously unsuitable” young woman would “pass away with the wind.”<sup>27</sup>

A reader wrote in March 1958 complaining about permissive parenting. The writer witnessed a three-year-old “read the riot act to his mother.” The writer asserted that what “modern children need is a large dose of parental permissiveness applied to their backsides,” and then rhetorically asked King, “Do you agree?” King responded in the affirmative, stating that “many modern parents go too far in allowing their children to express themselves with hardly a modicum of discipline.” King, also concerned with the latest trend in parenting, continued, “the child is permitted to almost terrorize the home for fear of having its individuality repressed. Somewhere along the way every child must be trained into the obligation of cooperative living. The child must realize there are rules of the game which he did not make and that he cannot break with impunity.” In order to get this message across to the child, King concluded, “it is often necessary to subject the child to disciplinary measures.” In his response King stressed an individual’s role as citizen and the need for conformity.<sup>28</sup>

In January 1958, *Ebony* published a letter from a boy in “Advice for Living,” that, according to the writer, was a “problem different from the ones most people have.” He is concerned that “he feels for boys the way [he] ought to feel about girls.” He sought advice on where to go and what to do. King, surprisingly, informed him that his problem was “not at all uncommon,” however, “it does require careful attention.” Taking a psychoanalytic approach in addressing the query, King stated that the youth’s problem was not due to “innate tendencies” but “culturally acquired.” He suggested that the young male “see a good psychiatrist who [could] assist . . . in bringing to the forefront of conscience all of those experiences and circumstances

---

<sup>27</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, April 1958, 104.

<sup>28</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, March 1958, 92.

that lead to the habit.” King’s suggestion that the young man seek psychiatric help was in line with the prescribed treatment for the time since homosexuality was considered a psychiatric disorder until the 1970s. By situating the youth’s homosexual tendencies as “not uncommon” and as something brought about through his environment or trauma, King removed the stigma associated with black homosexuality.<sup>29</sup>

In November 1957, a woman wrote in seeking advice on an ethical dilemma. This woman, it appears, was of middle- or upper-middle-class economic status and seemed to not like to indulge in the extra-curricular activities of her social set. She asserted

Our social set seems to be typical. The Husbands are interested in nothing but Scotch, sports cars and girlie magazines, and the wives do nothing but gossip, drink gin and buy clothes. My husband gets along well with this group but I don’t. It seems to me that there are more important things in life. Am I being snobbish?<sup>30</sup>

It is surprising, and also a tad ironic, that the problem that this “reader” had was actually inherent in the elements of lifestyle that *Ebony* promoted within its pages. Conspicuous consumption and the “good life” exhibited by one’s social set were all markers of the consumer lifestyle that was plastered in Cold War magazines and renderings of citizenship. It is also notable that this female writer was concerned with appearing “snobbish” for not wanting to participate in the activities of her class cohort, but was apparently not concerned with being a member of a social set that may have indeed been perceived as already snobbish by those who were not members of this privileged circle.

King responded to her letter with

I do not think you are being snobbish; you are simply responding to the highest good and best in your being. You are not saying that you are better than these persons intrinsically, but that you are giving your life to better spiritual and creative principles. You are simply living by the principles that every individual is made for that which is high, noble, and good. Man is more than a dog to be

---

<sup>29</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Jan. 1958, 34.

<sup>30</sup> “Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King,” *Ebony*, Nov. 1957, 106.

satisfied by the base of sensory pleasure and showy materialism: He is a being of spirit born for the stars and created for eternity. He who lives his life on the shallow level of the social set that you mention deprives himself of life in its fullness and makes impossible the fulfillment of his creative development.<sup>31</sup>

King's retort of "showy materialism" and criticism of "base sensory pleasure" also seemed a bit hypocritical and unmindful considering the space in which his column was contained. Scholars have documented how *Ebony* was the display shelf for conspicuous consumption in its efforts to equate consumer culture with American democracy. And to this end, African American spending power, or at least the potential, was a demonstration of the possibilities of black citizenship. Nonetheless, King's response was meant to shore up the race and have them absorb a consciousness civil rights leaders believed was necessary in order to fight for racial equality. The presentation of middle-class values, respectable black masculinity, femininity, and families, as well as the containment of black sexuality, were tools used to advance the civil rights movement.

### **Dan Burley: Fat, Squat, Jet-Black Cat**

Dan Burley—journalist, author, musician, disc jockey, composer, and infamous jive-ologist—was a noted celebrity, of sorts, for more than thirty years. Burley wrote for and, at times, was editor of many of the black newspapers of his era. As a member of the Negro Press during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Burley covered the gamut of Negro life and culture. In his tribute to Burley, fellow journalist A. S. "Doc" Young commented that "during his newspaper career, Dan wrote about everything—from murder to legal mayhem in the boxing ring...his interests were broad—encompassing Negro history, politics and religion among other subjects—his most sensitive feelings were for sports and show business." The *Chicago Defender*, *Chicago Bee*, *Amsterdam News*, and *New York Age* were just a few of the black-owned newspapers that

---

<sup>31</sup> "Advice for Living: By the Rev. Martin Luther King," *Ebony*, Nov. 1957, 106.



could claim Burley as a member of their staff. After twenty-three years of working as a newsman, Burley worked for Johnson Publishing Company as associate editor and staff writer for its two magazines, *Ebony* and *Jet*. Burley, the jazz man, was known for his “skiffle” music, and he had a group called Dan Burley and His Skiffle Boys. As a composer, he wrote and co-wrote several jazz tunes, including “Pig-Foot Sonata,” “They Raided the Joint,” and the “Chicken Shack Shuffle.” *South Side Shake, 1945-1951*, is a compilation of Burley’s recording with the Skiffle Boys and other jazz and blues legends. He also appeared on several other jazz and blues albums recorded during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1946, he was featured alongside Dizzy Gillespie in *Jivin’ in Be-Bop*, a movie that showcased jive music and dance. Burley also authored two books, *Dan Burley’s Harlem Book of Jive* and *Diggeth Thou?*

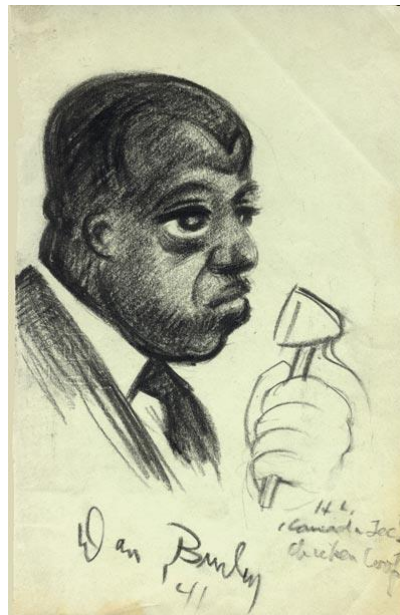


Figure 9: Daniel Gardner Burley. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Daniel Gardner Burley was born in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1907 to Anna and James Burley. Not much is known about Burley’s parents except that his father, a former slave, was a Baptist minister and Burley’s mother taught at the Tuskegee Institute under the tutelage of

Booker T. Washington.<sup>32</sup> The family moved, briefly, to Texas and then settled in Chicago when Burley was eleven years old. While a student at Wendell Phillips High School, Burley worked as a copyboy for the *Chicago Defender*.<sup>33</sup> In addition to working at the *Defender* and attending school, he also played boogie-woogie and “skiffle” music at rent parties. Burley, an accomplished pianist, was known to perform at events such as rent parties, which were very popular during the Depression. At these events, Burley honed his skills as a “skiffle” musician. Skiffle music, a hybrid of boogie-woogie, Dixieland jazz, and the blues, became almost synonymous with the name Dan Burley. He was credited with popularizing the term “skiffle,” and the music, as a genre, during the 1930s, and helped it re-emerge in the 1950s.

Burley left the *Chicago Defender* around 1932 and became editor and columnist for the *Chicago Bee* while concurrently working as a correspondent for the Associated Negro Press.<sup>34</sup> After spending approximately three years at the *Bee*, Burley returned to the *Defender*. It was during his brief return to the *Defender* that Burley created his first signature column “Back Door Stuff.”<sup>35</sup> Originally intended as a borderline risqué-gossip column, the purpose of “Back Door Stuff” was to expose everyone’s dirty little secrets. In his May 1, 1936, column, Burley cited the “preamble” of “Back Door Stuff’s” constitution:

This column, herein...shall be dedicated to the principles of telling the truth and nothing but the truth, on what goes on after dark; what transpires behind closed doors and what hubby and wifey do when apart during the day and night, whatever the case may be. It shall be forever the ideal for this column to stand on

---

<sup>32</sup> Kelly E. Rusinack, “Dan Burley,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* by Brucoli Clark Layman, 43–49.

<sup>33</sup> “Colorful Chicago Newsman Dan Burley Buried,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 Nov. 1962, New York Edition. Kelly Rusinack’s biography of Burley refutes this, however. Her account has Burley graduating from high school in 1928, which would have made him twenty-one years of age, and immediately going to work for the *Defender*.

<sup>34</sup> Rusinack, “Dan Burley,” 44.

<sup>35</sup> Among the few who have written about Burley, there seems to be some confusion about when “Back Door Stuff” first appeared in print. Rusinack writes that Burley originated “Back Door Stuff” while he was working for the *Amsterdam News*. A tribute that appeared in the *Pittsburgh Courier* has it debuting in the *Chicago Bee*. However, A. S. Young’s account that “Back Door Stuff” first appeared in the *Defender* seems to be the most accurate and what my research validates. A. S. Young, “The Legend of Dan Burley,” *Sepia*, Jan. 1963, 76–77.

the theory that what a man does is our business if we find out, and Lawd help his wife if she sings off-key.<sup>36</sup>

“Back Door Stuff” was also Burley’s sounding board, a vehicle where he expressed his concerns regarding current political and racial hypocrisy, a literary space where he waxed poetics, and a medium for him to name-drop. Journalist Doc Young wrote that

in ‘Back Door Stuff,’ Dan gossiped, commented on such items as Negro politics, Negro crime, Negro romance and the continual contest between Negroes and Caucasians, jazz, relief cases, general hustling, Negro preachers--everything that came to his mind. His comments throbbed with pointed needles and a rapier wit that slashed away the pretenion [sic] of the pseudo-sophisticated.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, in one of the first appearances of “Back Door Stuff” Burley tackled the issue of hypocrisy among blacks who put on airs in public and belittled members of the race who did not subscribe to a certain standard of living.

What’s Wrong--

Dear Back Door: You could do a lot of good if you constantly brought before the youth of today and the race in general the fact that what imperils it is that it lives too fast. It takes life too lightly. Our young men take to the bottle with an abandon that is alarming to one who has passed through mill without being touched therewith.

Smoking, thin stocking, cheek-to-cheek dancing, late hours all gang together in a conspiracy to rob us our heritage. Moving pictures depicting savage love in a penthouse; sudden and unpremeditated murder on questions of sex all influence our young to a life of crime or one of mental and moral stagnation.

If you print this, please leave my name off. The reason: I’m killing a bottle of old corn right now and the chick is powdering her nose in the other room!-- Side Door.<sup>38</sup>

The point of this piece was that “men will be men” in private, however, through satire, Burley conveyed to black folks that one’s public persona must be refined, sophisticated, and asexual. Burley was also very critical of those blacks whom he believed put on “airs.” Mel Tapley, in his memorial to Burley, recalled how Burley would expose those individuals “who showed up at

---

<sup>36</sup> Dan Burley, “Back Door Stuff,” *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1936, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Young, “The Legend of Dan Burley,” 76.

<sup>38</sup> Dan Burley, “Back Door Stuff,” *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 29, 1936, 13.

those invitation-only black-tie affairs at the Savoy or Golden Gate but slept in their Cadillacs and Lincolns. While Adam Powell was holding court at the Red Rooster or Jock's and the in-crowd was sipping and supping on champagne and chitlins, these Caddypad guys dined on cornflakes and gravy and hot dogs."<sup>39</sup>

When Burley left the *Defender* for the final time and went to work for the *Amsterdam News* in 1936, "Back Door Stuff" went with him. While "Back Door Stuff" maintained the same format it had in Chicago—a quasi-gossip column and sounding board for Burley—the tone changed slightly. Burley's commentaries were more cutting and direct. Burley's criticisms of disingenuous leaders, federal officials, and police officers reverberated throughout his columns. In this sense, Burley let it be known that it was not the individuals that frequented the dives that kept the race stagnate, but those folks who called themselves the servants of the people were the race's worst enemy.

It was during his tenure at the *Amsterdam News* that Burley created his other signature column, "Confidentially Yours." This column, similar to his first byline for the *Chicago Defender* "Sports Squib," allowed Burley to discuss sports and the achievements of African American athletes. Yet, "Confidentially Yours," unlike "Back Door Stuff," was overtly political. In "Confidentially Yours" Burley did not mince words, speak in signification, or jive as he had in "Back Door Stuff." Instead, he used "proper" English, and his prose lacked its usual lyrical flair. As Kelly Rusinack noted, "Burley was an outspoken proponent of integration and wrote often and passionately for the desegregation of all facets of American society."<sup>40</sup> In December 2000, Howie Evans, an *Amsterdam News Star* columnist, paid tribute to Burley and other black sports journalists who had worked for the *Amsterdam Star News*. As a tribute to Burley, Evans

---

<sup>39</sup> Mel Tapley, "Stirring up Sweet Memories of 'Sugar Hill'," *Amsterdam News*, Feb. 12, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> Rusinack, "Dan Burley," 46.

reprinted an excerpt from a column Burley had written in 1945 that conveyed his frustration with white resistance toward integrating baseball. Evans believed that it was due to the Negro press and journalists such as Burley, in conjunction with other societal forces, that baseball became integrated.<sup>41</sup>

After Jackie Robinson integrated baseball in 1947, Burley continued to address the racism that existed inside the National League. In a column entitled, “I’ll Throw This One Out and Then Duck,” written in June 1947, Burley disclosed that Robinson was beset with racial slurs from National League players. He suggested that Robinson, in particular, and black Americans, in general, not take those epithets personally and “learn not to flinch at the word we all hate so thoroughly that others use to describe and embarrass us. If we stopped letting it make us feel so badly or inferior, we would overcome a major barrier toward our advancement,” he wrote.<sup>42</sup> Burley knew that his opinion would not be popular with his audience, hence the title of the article, but Burley rarely shied away from discussing what he believed to be his truth. When it came to integration, Burley, like the rest of America, was struggling with what “integration” meant and where the onus would and should lie.

In a column titled “What Happened on the 5:15 to Suburbia,” Burley again addressed the enigmatic question of integration. He began his piece by positing that integration had myriad interpretation: “Some take it to be integrated women—both races; some see it as political, still others as intellectual.”<sup>43</sup> In this piece, Burley wrote a parable, of sorts, depicting two men, one black and the other white. Both were businessmen, taking the train from work to the suburbs. The black man in Burley’s story was “fat, squat, jet-black, brown-eyed fuzzy-haired young man

---

<sup>41</sup> Rusinack, “Dan Burley,” 46.

<sup>42</sup> Rusinack, “Dan Burley,” 46.

<sup>43</sup> Chuck Stone. “A Stone’s Throw: ‘A Tribute to Dan Burley,’” *Afro American*, Nov. 17, 1962, 5.

carrying a bag and ... a light topcoat.” The white man was “tall, blond, blue-eyed crew cut young man in Ivy League attire toting his alligator briefcase and ... a light topcoat.” Throughout the narrative, Burley contrasted the men as almost identical except for race and the fact that the black man donned more expensive accessories. As the representative white man puffed on his “3-for-a-dollar El Producto” that he had extracted from a “gold-embossed cigar case,” the squat, black young man across the aisle produced a diamond-studded case, extracted \$7.50 custom-made Upmann, lighted it with a \$60.00 paper-thin butane lighter, and slowly puffed in luxury.”<sup>44</sup> The raced-contest in the fictitious narrative continued with Burley comparing the men’s briefcases, the method in which they produced notes (the white man uses a ball-point pen, whereas the black man toted a portable secretary with a Dictaphone), to the type of car they drove, and finally a comparison of their respective wives:

The white man walked with regal stride, as though the world was his, toward an elegant 1960 sleek, black Eldorado Brougham waiting on the curb. The door was opened by his auburn-tressed youngish wife bedecked in \$10,000 black diamond mink. Happily hollering “Daddy” was his small son trim in a \$150 Buster Brown suit. He kissed his wife and looked up in time to see the black, squat young man walking leisurely to a gleaming, gold-plated Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud with radio telephone, built in bar and hi-fi record FM player. The white young man, mouth-opened, stared as a stoutish, black chauffeur in a smart uniform with boots touched his cap visor, held open the door for his employer. Inside the white man, his wife and son gawked as the squat black young man kissed a coal black, handsome woman wearing a \$30,000 Russian Sable on the cheek, fondled his son attired in a \$375 hand-stitched Brooks Brothers suit... . Meanwhile a black boxer barked joyously from the chauffeur’s compartment. Unable to stand it any longer, the young white man rushed from his El Dorado like a madman to the Rolls-Royce and losing complete control, began banging with his fist on the hood, screaming at the top of his voice, “N--r, N--r, N--r!” The black man startled, looked apprehensively and excitedly turned around. “Where??” he screamed.<sup>45</sup>

Suburbia was the metaphor for integration. The conductor yelled, “Suburbia, last stop,” and the two men exited. In this brief narrative, Burley seemed to draw on all the connotations of

---

<sup>44</sup> Stone, “A Stone’s Throw,” 5.

<sup>45</sup> Stone, “A Stone’s Throw,” 5.

integration that loomed in the minds of blacks and whites. Was integration just access to the finer things in life, the ability to buy a nice car, to have a chauffeur, or to be included in the middle-class equation of having a beautiful wife, a doting son, and a dog? The squat, fuzzy haired black young man competed with his racial foil in the social and economic realm of society. He not only won, he surpassed the young white man. Burley recognized the myriad interpretations of integration. In his interpretation, integration, for blacks, meant access to places and spaces that had been denied; integration for whites meant confronting the possibility of losing the “privileges” of whiteness and accepting black mobility—even if that mobility surpassed white mobility and gave blacks access into Edenesque suburbia. Burley suggested that, fundamentally, integration and its many iterations, was irrelevant if white America continued to subjugate blacks to the status of “N--r!”

Although Burley’s commentary was written with a humorous bent, it was also very cutting and, as stated, subject to many interpretations. In this column and in previous ones, he urged blacks to ignore slurs and stereotypes cast against them that attempted to render them inferior. African Americans need not be deterred or disempowered any longer by the “air thus used,” but should forge ahead in the race for equality.<sup>46</sup> He presented the goal of the war—suburbia. The integrated black man had won his personal battle, and his reward was upper middle-class status. Burley, the sage and the person with his eye in the keyhole looking through the “back-door,” felt that whites would resist integration by subjugating blacks either verbally or physically.

Yet, even the white man’s attempt at marking the black man as inferior was met with resistance. The white man called him a nigger, a term used to disarm the black man of his class

---

<sup>46</sup> Rusinack, “Dan Burley,” 47.

status, achievements, and his masculinity. When the black gentleman heard the term *nigger*, he looks up as well; he, too, wants to see the undesirable who dared enter suburbia. The “new” Negro, Burley suggested, did not identify with such debasing terms. The suburban black man was oblivious to the fact that this term was directed at him. Thus, this story also reflected the symbolic/historical power shift between black and white men. A term that once wielded such power when spoken by white men to black men was now powerless when this particular black man did not respond. Another reading of the column could question whether the upper middle-class black man had lost his “blackness” because of integration, or assimilation. For Burley, black manhood was not only about one’s race and gender. For him, it was more complicated, evidenced by the way he created his own public persona. Thus, the black male was the foundation for the race and the purveyors of history and culture. When the “black, squat young man” did not become angry when he was called a “N--r,” and instead responded “where?” he demonstrated that he did not “remember,” thus a loss of history and recollection regarding how the term was used to subjugate his race. Hence, he forgot he was a black man. It could be argued that although Burley was a strong proponent of integration and black upward mobility, he was also concerned that blacks would forget or lose their “blackness.”

This notion of a distinct yet intangible “blackness” that Burley articulated in masculinity was also evident in his two books, *Dan Burley’s Harlem Book of Jive* and *Diggeth Thou?*, his magazine, *Duke*, and through his performance of jazz. Jazz, as a musical genre, had its own unique culture. Although it is debatable who “founded” jazz, either black or white musicians, what is not contested is that jazz was American-made and a disproportionately a male domain.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> For a history on Jazz, see Barry Ulanov, *History of Jazz in America* (New York, 1972); Charley Gerard, *Jazz in Black and White: Race, Culture and Identity in the Jazz Community* (Westport, 1998); and Derek B. Scott, *Music, Culture and Society: A Reader* (New York, 2000).



Jazz musicians had their own language, style of fashion, and even their own style of walk. David Ake has asserted that jazz modeled images of race and “representing blackness.”<sup>48</sup> Notions of “hipness” and virility permeated jazz culture. Ake wrote that “it is neither coincidental nor insignificant that jazz and heterosexual prowess are two of the few areas in which black males have been perceived to be superior to their white counterparts.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, black men discovered an arena to demonstrate their manhood, one that required a level a skill, mastery, and sophistication, and let them express their manhood unapologetically. However, there was another element to jazz, especially for Burley, that made it a distinctly black form of music.

Burley, a well-known jazz musician in his own right, was becoming dissatisfied with the way jazz was changing. Once a form of music that relied on improvisation—which symbolically reflected the condition of life in the inner cities, especially for those who had migrated from the South to the North, jazz, like jive, was a form of emotional expression and release. However, by the 1940s, jazz had lost its improvisational style and was becoming more polished—hence losing its urban edge. Burley authored several columns related to jazz, some focused on the “war” between white and black musicians, and others commenting on the condition of jazz. In “It Ain’t Real Unless It’s Dirty, Hungry and Lowbrow,” a reprint of Burley’s that appeared in Peter Tamony’s essay, “Funky,” Burley wrote,

Jazz has developed or deteriorated into a state where more time is spent polishing up unusual noises than in playing music. If it is supposed to be jazz, it must perform the function of reporting on a condition of life, always on a lower corridor of human existence which the player must have experienced or understands through the work of others. This condition of living remains changeless so long as the sociological, economic, political and moral forces keep it that way.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> David Ake, “Re-Masculating Jazz: Ornette Coleman, ‘Lonely Woman,’ and the New York Jazz Scene in the Late 1950s,” *American Music*, (Spring, 1998), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Ake, “Re-Masculating Jazz,” 27.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Tamony, “Funky,” *American Speech* (Autumn, 1980), 212.

In Burley's opinion, a good jazz musician—an authentic jazz musician—must have experienced the “lower corridor of human existence.” Although this excerpt did not go into detail regarding what was considered a “lower corridor,” a decent hypothesis would include racial, economic, and historic oppression in the United States. Further, Burley did not specifically mention the race of those who inhabited those “corridors,” but he set-up a dynamic between those who were economically, socially, and politically oppressed against those who had power. Thus, any supposition would conclude that Burley was asserting that only blacks (or poor whites) who had been disenfranchised in the United States could truly convey the purpose of jazz. Yet there was a caveat, possibly made not to be totally exclusionary, for those who had not experienced the lower corridors of human hell. Burley acknowledged that they, too, could play jazz, but only under the tutelage of an “authentic” jazz musician.

Jazz musicians—good jazz musician—symbolized not just a mastery of a musical art form, but also what was considered the epitome of “cool,” urbane, and modern. Marlene Kim Connor has suggested that cool was “uniquely a black experience,” and that black men had to develop a sense of cool—that of being angry on the inside but remaining calm and emotionally in control externally because their survival depended upon it.<sup>51</sup> Jazz musicians, as conveyors of the turbulence and the oppression that existed in the inner cities, set an example for a type of black manhood. Unlike the race leaders who represented a certain segment of the black populace, normally the middle class, the jazz musician occupied that liminal space between low- and high-brow, and conveyed the “condition...[of] the lower corridor” through music and transformed it into art. Ultimately, what the black jazz musician symbolized was the war of the classes (high brow vs. low brow), inner-city survival, and giving voice to those experiences. But, most

---

<sup>51</sup> Marlene Kim Connor, *What is Cool?: Understanding Black Manhood in America* (New York, 1995).

importantly, he defined what it meant to be a man. The concept of cool began in the urban streets, and manhood was only achieved once a man's peers deemed him cool.<sup>52</sup> *Duke*, the title of Burley's magazine, was named after the famous Duke Ellington. Although Ellington was known as a famous composer and band leader, he was also considered a very regal, sophisticated, and confident man. His style of dress, his outward demeanor, and the air in which he carried himself exuded cool. *Duke*, the magazine, wanted to capture and convey this sense of a black masculine cool.

### ***Duke: Truly Manhood in All Its Glory***

Created during the civil rights era when representations of black male sexuality were not directly on display, but black male bodies were, *Duke* undoubtedly was the antithesis of what civil rights leaders wanted to promote regarding the character of black men. *Duke* seemed to be an amalgam of *Playboy*, *Esquire*, and *Ebony*. Within its pages one would find images of scantily clad black women, short stories written by preeminent authors such as Chester Hines, James Baldwin, and Ray Bradbury, black men modeling the latest fashions, and articles extolling the superiority of African Americans in the realm of jazz and sports. Similar to *Ebony*, *Duke* was a magazine that sought to reflect the comfort and urbanity of the African American middle class. As the first African-American "girlie" magazine, *Duke* was published under the assumptions that it would have an existing audience. *Ebony* had a history of publishing cheesecake images of black women; *Playboy*, which started publication in 1953, appeared to be doing quite well; and then there was the publisher of *Duke*, Dan Burley, jazz musician, journalist, author, and cultural

---

<sup>52</sup> Connor, *What is Cool?*

personality, whom, many thought would guarantee the magazine's success based on his name alone.

As Kinohi Nishikawa has noted, “the excitement that greeted *Duke* suggest[ed] that conditions were ripe for a medium to represent and advertise the African American good life on its own terms.”<sup>53</sup> And, indeed, months prior to *Duke*'s inaugural issue, there were rumors in the press that Burley was heading a new venture. Al Monroe's eavesdrop-style column, “so they say,” announced on February 26, 1957, that “Dan Burley is reported ‘out’ at Johnson Publications.”<sup>54</sup> Monroe's placement of “out” in quotation marks implied that his knowledge regarding Burley's departure from Johnson Publishing was based on a reliable source and that maybe Burley's leaving Johnson Publishing was possibly a dismissal rather than a resignation. Johnson's reputation for being “trigger-quick” regarding the dismissal of his employees was already known within the publishing world, as well as Burley's reputation for not being able to maintain steady, long-term employment. Thus, Burley's departure from Johnson Publishing was possibly viewed as less of a shock to many readers than an inevitability. Yet, coincidentally, or possibly indicative of damage control, six days earlier, Joe “Ziggy” Johnson's February 20, 1957, column, “Zig & Zag,” made note of Burley presence in Chicago: “Boys in the lobby at the Gotham remarking: Everybody can get away from the Windy City but Dan Burley. To which one gentleman who knew Dan when he was the Casanova Kid said, ‘The man's in love. Leave him alone.’”<sup>55</sup>

Burley's reputation as a “womanizer” was part of Chicago lore. As Enoch Waters recalled in his memoir, in spite of all his talents, Burley's “personal life was always in turmoil.”

---

<sup>53</sup> Kinohi Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability, and the Short Life of Duke Magazine,” *Book History* (vol. 15, 2012), 153.

<sup>54</sup> Al Monroe, “so they say,” *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 26, 1957, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Joe Johnson, Zig & Zag with Joe “Ziggy” Johnson, *Chicago Defender*, February 20, 1957, 15.

Burley, being “aware of his perpetual state of confusion, decided that marriage would bring order out of chaos.” His first wife, Gustava McCurdy, was a classical singer, and according to Waters, this marriage, a blend of high- and low-culture, was “doomed from the outset.” The newlyweds spent their wedding night at the Grand Hotel, where Burley “was no stranger.” As Waters recounted,

Dan ordered a bottle of the bar’s best champagne. As an occasional transient guest with a variety of women, he was not noted as a big spender, so service to others who promised bigger tips took precedence over Dan’s order. By the time the bellhop responded to Dan’s order, the loving couple was in the midst of consummating their wedding vows. The bellhop’s knock on the door startled Dan. With the instinctive reaction of an alert playboy, who had warily occupied the marital beds of unsuspecting husbands, he tore himself from his bride’s embrace and leaped from the second floor window spraining an ankle while landing on the South Parkway sidewalk.<sup>56</sup>

Water’s cautioned the validity of the story is unknown, although Burley was seen walking with a limp. Still, this lore served as a demonstration of Burley’s “once” man-about-town ways and positioned him as a likely editor of *Duke*.

Less than a month later the *Defender*’s “Off the Record” announced that Burley, along with three other former Johnson Publishing employees, was at the helm of *Duke*, “the tan counterpart of *Playboy*.” As well as mentioning Burley, Lee Blackwell’s column stated that Kim Karter, a former Chicago school marm turned singer, was “asked to pose for an eye-catching” centerfold. The next announcement regarding *Duke*, “New Magazine Aimed for Men,” appeared a few weeks later, April 13, in the *Defender*. This second announcement, similar to the first, firmly positioned Burley as the originator of the magazine. However, whereas the first

---

<sup>56</sup> Waters, *American Diary*, 168–69.

announcement puts *Duke* on par with *Playboy* and stressed centerfolds and pictorials, the second announcement was more tamed and explicitly connected *Duke* to *Ebony* and its “male readers.”<sup>57</sup>

What is to be made of the press Burley and *Duke* received prior to the premiere issue in June 1957 and how did the idea of *Duke* come about? According to Burns, in his autobiography, the idea for *Duke* was presented to him by his partner Max Cooper. The two men, along with Al Golin, were partners in a public relations firm, Cooper, Burns, & Golin. Cooper, Burns wrote, hoped to capitalize on Burns’s past experiences in working for Negro publications and with Publishers Development, the same publishing house responsible for *Guns* and *Modern Man*.<sup>58</sup> Cooper wanted to create a black version of *Playboy*, a magazine that was more “restrained and less raunchy” than the black romance genre magazines that were popular during this time, such as *Tan Confessions* and *Bronze Thrill*, which, according to Burns, found popularity “among less educated blacks.” Cooper had a different black demographic in mind. He wanted to create a magazine that would target young sophisticated and middle-class aspiring black men. Burns had his doubts regarding the success of a black men’s magazine, writing that

To me, prospects for a black version of *Playboy* seemed to be less than promising. My negative judgment was founded on my observation while at *Ebony* and *Jet* of a rather straitlaced attitude toward nudity even among urban, middle-class Negroes who would have to constitute most of the potential readership. Many *Ebony* and *Jet* readers had protested when revealing photos or offbeat sexual stories had appeared in those magazines. Even though romance-type publications, such as *Tan Confessions* and *Bronze Thrills*, had found an audience among less educated blacks, I could not be convinced that an upgraded sex-oriented magazine was likely to be successful.<sup>59</sup>

Even if Burns’s account of the origins of the concept of *Duke* is entirely factual, he had other reasons to be leery of such an endeavor. When he was editor of *Ebony*, Burns and Johnson

---

<sup>57</sup> Lee Blackwell, “Off the Record,” *Chicago Defender*, Mar. 21, 1957, 8; “New Magazine Aimed for Men,” *Chicago Defender*, April 13, 1957, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 205-206.

<sup>59</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 206.

Publishing were often the target of critics. Many of Johnson's distractors and competitors did not believe that he was the creative force behind his magazine. News that *Ebony* had a white editor in its midst only fueled accusations that *Ebony* was not black-owned, and if it was, a white man was still in charge. The goal of these attacks was to incite readers to believe that *Ebony* was not authentically "black," and that the shape and form of the magazine was the creation of the white editor. In addition, as editor for *Modern Man* for Publishers Development, Burns had faced indictment charges for violation of obscenity laws. Yet, despite his reservations, Burns took Cooper up on the offer. Cooper came up with the initial investors—ten individuals who contributed three thousand dollars apiece. Although twenty thousand dollars short of their initial goal, Cooper and Burns proceeded with creating the first black men's girlie magazine.<sup>60</sup>

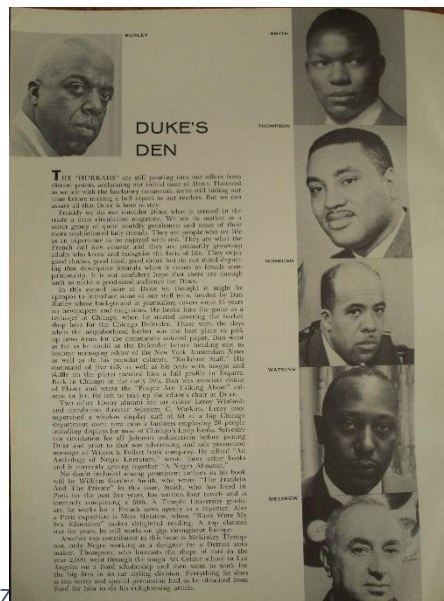


Figure 10: July, 1957

To avoid any backlash from African American readers who might have been put off by a white editorial staff creating and publishing a black men's entertainment magazine, Burns felt that a recognizable black figure should be used to "project a black image editorially." According to Burns, Burley was chosen as the person who should project this image. Burley, who was once

<sup>60</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 206.

again unemployed, presumably from Johnson Publishing, was selected to “front” as *Duke*’s editor for a fee of forty-dollars a week. In addition to assuming the role of “editor,” Burley’s other duties, according to Burns, included presenting himself at *Duke*’s publishing offices twice a week to write feature articles.<sup>61</sup> If Burns’s story is accurate, then the marketing ploy was very successful. The editorial style of *Duke* resembled the image that Burley had crafted for himself in New York and in Chicago as a musician, author, journalist, and Renaissance man. All of the issues of *Duke* surveyed for this study firmly signaled that Burley was indeed the crafter of *Duke*. For example, the approbations from readers to the editor not only addressed Burley by name, but also credited the magazine as being his brainchild. Each issue contained articles and poetry written by Burley, and, along with articles, Burley contributed man-about-town gossip to *Duke*, similar to his “Back Door Stuff” column which was still popular in the black press and emblematic of Burley’s persona—that he alone had access to information and places that “normal” men did not. Indeed, Burley seemed to personify all of these archetypes: the entertainer, intellectual, and even the Casanova, which, for all intents and purposes, made Burley the logical choice to head *Duke*.

Regardless, in 1957, most observers believed that Burley was at the helm of the first black men’s entertainment magazine. Burley’s lyrical flare, his celebrity connections, and his own success within the publishing and entertainment industries undoubtedly, many had assumed, would make *Duke* a success. Even so, the publishers of *Duke* had a mighty task on their hands in attempting to sell an entertainment magazine specifically for black men that reflected African Americans as a sensual, if not sexual, citizens. Of course, it was not the selling of an entertainment magazine to black men that was the issue—*Playboy* as well as *Esquire* had a black

---

<sup>61</sup> Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 206-207.



following. As Marjorie Bryer pointed out, there was evidence—anecdotal and statistical—that many nonwhites and women were readers of *Playboy*.<sup>62</sup> She further contended that black publications, specifically *Ebony* and *Hue*, used the black pin-up “to counter negative white stereotypes of African American women and advance the cause of civil rights.”<sup>63</sup> Bryer connected the intersections expressed within the pages of lifestyle magazines—consumption, identity, citizenship, equality, and beauty—as tools for political and social advancement for African Americans. But *Hue*, *Jet*, and *Ebony*, as lifestyle magazines, appeared qualitatively different from *Duke*. The promotion of black sexuality, and black male sexuality specifically, was still taboo, and *Duke* emphasized and celebrated an unrestricted heteronormative black sexuality that, as King criticized, had black men reacting to “the base of sensory pleasure.” The allusion to unfettered black male sexuality was counterproductive to the goals of the civil rights agenda.

Many post-World War II black publications stressed domesticity and consumption as the exemplars of black respectability and Cold War conformity, and what was at the core of Johnson publications was the behavior, tastes, and values of the black middle-class family and consumerism; both black men and women were contained within their pages by modeling the black family or the potential for a black family unit. Yet, *Duke*, like *Ebony*, also encouraged matrimony by making visible black women as potential partners—in proscribed and gendered terms. As Claire Morgan Tichi observed, Cold War magazines “urged [the] regulation of the single female body, structured [her] free time through ethical leisure, and cultivated the career as

---

<sup>62</sup> Marjorie Lee Bryer, “Representing the Nation: Pinups, *Playboy*, and Pageants, and Racial Politics, 1945-1966” (Ph.D diss., University of Minnesota, 2003), 123.

<sup>63</sup> Bryer, “Representing the Nation,” 342.

single female vocation.”<sup>64</sup> The use of black women’s bodies within the confines of these pages not only helped to define the ideal black male sexual citizen, it also allowed for black men to discern between the type of woman available for marriage versus the type who were meant purely for sexual enjoyment. Therefore, the goal of both magazines was nearly the same—the re/presentation of middle-class respectability as reflective of black citizenship. Yet, as Nishikawa suggested, the liberalism of black sexuality and the conservatism of black respectability were at odds.<sup>65</sup>

As the two aforementioned newspaper announcements reveal, even the black press had some unease with promoting *Duke* as a “Playboy” type magazine that showcased the beauty and bodies of black women. The announcement in Lee Blackwell’s “Off the Record” that Kim Karter (who, coincidentally, was self-made in her own right by transforming from a Chicago school teacher into a singer) had plans to pose for *Duke* demonstrated the caution that the press and magazines exercised regarding the promotion of black female sexuality and how they attempted to contain it. In “Off the Record,” Blackwell along with mentioning the possibility of Karter posing for a “‘Playboy’ type center photo spread in ‘Duke’ magazine,” also included that “‘incidentally, Kim ‘broke it up’ in Pittsburgh’s Flamingo hotel and then hied [sic] away to Philadelphia to be with her true love, a handsome naval officer.” Karter, who was dubbed “Kissin’ Kim” and described as having a “winning smile and bubbling personality,” had a stage presence that made it “appear to every male in the [audience] that she sings solely for his benefit.” As one male attendee commented, “When she sang of love, I found myself getting goose pimples because it seemed as though she was actually singing to me....and she sounded

---

<sup>64</sup> Claire Morgan Tichi, “Bachelors, Domesticity, and Domestic Space in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960” (Ph.D diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 154.

like she meant it, too.” Although Karter “broke it up” for entertainment purposes, her “true” self was not the “self” invested in entertainment, or for that matter, in displaying her body. In fact, she was putatively content to isolate herself with her “soldier.” Thus, the press mitigated and mediated Karter’s body and sexuality. In order to have her maintain black female respectability, her sexuality was confined to marriage, or at least a monogamous relationship.<sup>66</sup>

Despite what the papers had reported, the premiere issue of *Duke*, the first black-girlie magazine for men, was June 1957.<sup>67</sup> *Duke* provided black men with a magazine comparable to *Playboy*. A comparison between the earlier issues of *Playboy*, whose first issue was published in December 1953, and *Duke* revealed many similarities. Both magazines were published in Chicago and targeted a more urbane male interested in fashion, music, sports and sophistication, and both promoted a “literary” bent (which added to their sophistication) by including reprints of short stories by famous authors such as Ray Bradbury and Erskine Caldwell. There was also a “Features” section, allowing up-and-coming journalists/writers to present their articles and, of course, images of semi-nude women. The differences between the two magazines, some slight, were very telling. Whereas *Playboy* would occasionally focus on jazz, every issue of *Duke* surveyed had a feature on jazz or some genre of music. Burley would not only include short stories, but also short prose or poetry, most often authored by himself. The most distinct difference between the two magazines had to do with advertising; *Playboy* had advertisements within its pages, *Duke* did not. There are several possible reasons why *Duke* did not have any advertisers in the issues surveyed. The publishers, following Johnson’s example, were possibly waiting six months before approaching advertisers to demonstrate the demand for the magazine,

---

<sup>66</sup> Blackwell, “Off the Record,” 8; “Kim Karter Sings at Flamingo,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Mar. 9, 1957, 31.

<sup>67</sup> According to Fritz Pollard, Sr, he published a magazine called *It Magazine* during the 1930s. Dear Duke, Letter from Fritz Pollard, *Duke*, June 1957, 4.

or the concept for a black men's entertainment magazine may have been too risqué and financially unappealing for advertisers.

The covers of the *Duke* issues offered subtle indicators that *Duke* was a magazine targeting a black male audience. On each cover of *Duke* a well-dressed mannequin dominated the page. The fashionably dressed mannequin branded *Duke* not just as a lifestyle magazine but one that was invested in packaging and selling a product. Interestingly, the mannequin had no facial features other than button eyes. The absence of a "real" male model (except the very last issue which featured Duke Ellington) or symbol, such as a white rabbit (*Playboy*), or the rosy-cheeked white, middle-aged male (*Esquire*), allowed for reader to vicariously embody the persona of the well-dressed urbane male. The mannequin, in a sense, represented "everyman" who could "see" himself as the modern black man. Further, the mannequin, as de facto black man, allowed for black men not to be visibly seen or present, only represented and imagined. The notion of being seen and yet unseen was a phenomenon peculiar to black masculinity. The myriad stereotypes associated with the black males and black manhood had contributed to the allusion that his identity, behavior, and taste were known. As spectacle, the mannequin (like black men) captured the spectator's gaze. The spectator or prospective reader of

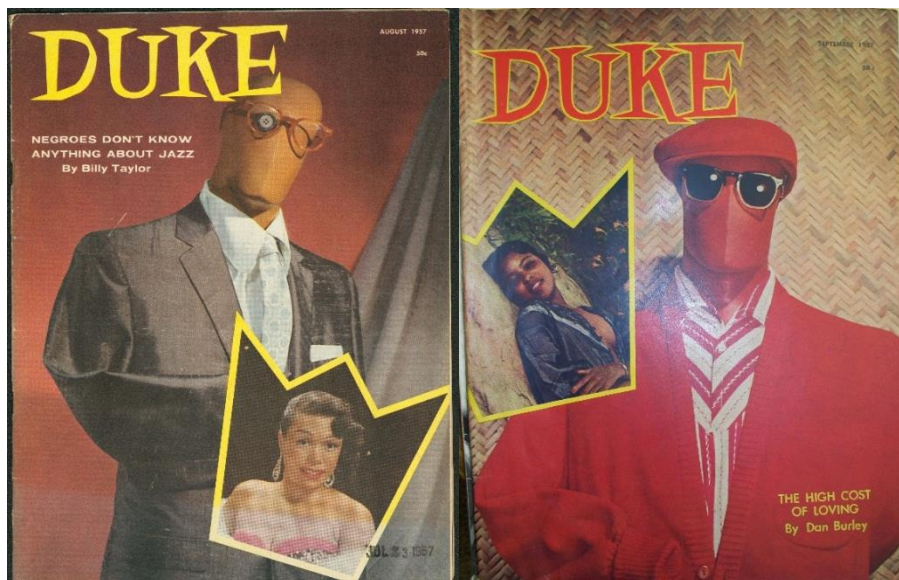


Figure 11: Duke Covers. June (top left), July (top right), August (bottom left) September (bottom right).

*Duke* was not supposed to associate different traits and behaviors with this new image, representative of black manhood. The mannequin, de facto black man, captured the spectator's gaze because he was different from existing images and representations of black manhood. Likewise, the button, representing eyes or sight, possibly, was done to grab the viewer's attention. The image of the one-button eye resembled a monocle, which provided an air of

royalty, class, and sophistication, and theoretically, could be contextualized as representing single sight or single vision in respect to black masculinity.

The mid-1950s marked an interesting era for blacks in the United States. It was the “start” of the Civil Rights Movement, schools were legally desegregated, and nationally and internationally black bodies were seen on television demonstrating and protesting for social equality. Similarly, viewers witnessed violence against presumably respectable middle-class African Americans. Thus, black solidarity, uniformity, and conformity took on a new importance—a singular public political vision. The one-button-eyed mannequin was perhaps the editor’s creative way of suggesting that black masculinity should also be self-focused and have a single vision. Was it possible that Burley was borrowing the Du Boisian concept of “double-consciousness” or “two-ness” regarding black masculinity with his vision for *Duke*? Du Bois’s theory was that black men have “double consciousness,” the ability to see themselves through the eyes of the “other.” Du Bois wrote that the black man would always feel his two-ness, “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body....”<sup>68</sup> Thus, was Burley trying to rid himself, and subconsciously persuade other black men as well, to rid themselves of their two-ness; of their two-sighted-ness? To not see themselves through the eyes of another, but through their own eyes; to rid themselves of white (mis)perception and have the singular vision of black unity, black power and black manhood? If so, here was *Duke*, a magazine for black men, published by a black man.

Another staple of each cover issue of *Duke* was the yellow-outlined “duchess crown” that was the inset for the image of the “Duchess of the Month.” On the cover of the premiere issue of *Duke* there was a one-button-eyed tanned mannequin wearing a brown and white-checkered

---

<sup>68</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1994).

fedora and a brownish button-down dress shirt with white-lace overlay. In the lower right segment of the page (appropriately covering the mannequin's heart) was a tilted yellow outlined crown, and inside the crown was the picture of the "Duchess of the Month," Eleanor Crew, who bore a remarkable resemblance to Eartha Kitt. She was portrayed gazing into the camera, lying nude on her stomach, with her left arm supporting her weight and conspicuously hiding her breasts. In the upper right segment of the cover, closer to the mannequin's head, were listed the names of the authors that would appear in the current issue of *Duke*: Chester Himes, Ray Bradbury, Langston Hughes, and Erskine Caldwell. Finally, the title of the magazine, *Duke*, appeared in stark yellow lettering across the fedora, seemingly replacing the hat as the mannequin's crown. In smaller yellow lettering, but not as bold, was the date, June 1957 and the cost of the issue, fifty cents. Indeed, at first glance, it was not very apparent that *Duke* was a magazine that specifically catered to black men, a possible indicator of the unease the publishers felt at launching such a magazine. Yet, what could possibly be discerned from the magazine covers was how the publishers wanted to signify black masculinity via cues for dress, intellect, and virility without naming or placing the signified.

The remaining covers surveyed were subtly different and progressively placed less emphasis on the black male "reader," and instead connected more with the black male consumer and his sexuality. The July cover of *Duke* featured a red mannequin with two black button eyes and a red and black Ivy-striped cap. The mannequin was in front of a yellow-tan wall from which hung an array of caps. "Duke" is in brown lettering. The "Duchess," Maxine Chancellor, appeared in an upright yellow-outlined crown, white negligee, balloons behind her, with a raised cocktail glass toasting an anonymous, presumably, male holding a cocktail. Underneath the

crown the byline reads, “The Myth of Our Virility,” by George S. Schuyler. Duchess of the month is over the heart again.

Unlike the previous two covers, the August issue of *Duke* featured a mannequin wearing a suit and tie, with a white dress shirt and a white handkerchief in the breast pocket. The mannequin was contrasted against a reddish backdrop with grey draping that complemented the grey silk suit. Round-rimmed tortoise shell glasses accentuated the look. Similar to the previous issue, only one article was listed on the cover. Another similarity was that this article, like Schuyler’s, had a provocative title, “Negroes Don’t Know Anything About Jazz,” by Billy Taylor, and the yellow crown that displayed the “Duchess of the Month” was just beneath the breast pocket. However, August’s Duchess, who was designated “the Blonde Duchess” in the table of contents, was not the woman who appeared on the cover. The cover model in the duchess crown inset, unlike the previous Duchesses, was not posing in a seductive or cheesecake manner, nor was she the centerfold for the issue. This cover model was dressed in an off-the-shoulder gown, made of pink chiffon and grey sequin overlay, similar to what an entertainer might wear during a performance.

September’s issue has a wicker background with a red mannequin looking straight on, wearing a red cap, black sunglasses (eyes not seen), red sweater-vest, and red and white (pinkish) shirt. “Duke” is in red lettering outlined in yellow. The “Duchess” inset, which appears next to the mannequin’s head, was the first time that the crown appeared next to the mannequin’s head and not over his heart. September’s “Duchess,” Dorothy Petersen, was photographed outdoors amongst nature. She was leaning against a large boulder alongside trees. She wore a blue shirt, opened, exposing a side view of her left breast, and her face had a slight smile, showing her teeth. She, to date, was the darkest of the Duchesses to appear on the cover. Both the duchess



inset and the mannequin were directly below the title of the magazine, “Duke.” The positioning of the duchess’s crown next to the mannequin head suggested, symbolically at least, an equal pairing. If the placement of the duchess inset over the heart signifies an urban black man’s desire and fantasy—a light-skin, seductive, cosmopolitan black female—then the duchess inset next to the mannequin’s head must signify what he needs—a dark-skin, rural, seductive female. The positioning of duchess’s crown next to the mannequin’s head underneath the title “Duke” seems to coronate this union. “The High Cost of Loving” by Dan Burley appeared over the sweater pocket patch (or heart).

If the name *Duke* did not articulate the role and intent of the magazine, then the inaugural address, within the monthly feature, “Duke Debut,” made it quite clear to the intended audience (and even frightened individuals) the veiled purpose of the magazine.

For ITS tremulous debut in the world of letters, Duke has been well fortified with a literary lineup that spells all-star in any league. And it is our hopeful ambition to keep up the high level of talent on these pages which will be devoted in coming months to a simple but dedicated resolve—to provide reading entertainment in the world of color. Duke will strive to cater to the sophisticated, urbane tastes of our Ivy-minded males who have advanced fully enough so that virility is more than a word and adult truly connotes manhood in all its glories. We have no causes and no axes to grind except to bring moments of pleasure to he-men and their female friends of like mind with an amusing, delightful package of assorted goodies, ranging from top-notch fiction to the pinup lovelies placed on display in our “Duchess Of The Month” department each issue.<sup>69</sup>

In this issue, gracing the first page, were six headshots of renowned black literary artists, Chester Himes, George Schuyler, William Fisher, and Langston Hughes. Seemingly needing to impress upon its audience that *Duke* was not superior in name only, Burley wanted to demonstrate that what was inside the pages of the magazine was also first class by using such superlatives as “all-star” and “top-notch” to demonstrate the quality of the magazine. Despite using Ray Bradbury

---

<sup>69</sup> “Duke Debut,” *Duke*, June 1957, 2.

name on the front cover, a white novelist whose excerpts also appeared in *Playboy*, Bradbury's image does not appear alongside the faces of the other "top-notch" black authors. Interestingly, it seems that the fiction of Bradbury and Caldwell appeared in *Duke* for the sole purpose of satirizing whites.

Besides featuring reprints from preeminent fiction writers to suggest that *Duke* was no run-of-the-mill magazine and was seriously positioning itself as a competitor to *Playboy* and *Esquire*, the titles of the reprints, as mentioned, were very provocative. The chapter titles of these excerpts that appeared in *Duke*, however, were not the titles that appeared in the original fiction. For example, Ray Bradbury's reprint, "The Last White Man," was actually titled, "The Other Foot," in *The Illustrated Man*. The changing of the reprint's title from its original was undoubtedly a tool to catch the attention and to lure not just men (and women) interested in literature, but also a way of positioning and constructing a black male identity. Thus *Duke*, a black gentleman's magazine that, for all intents and purposes—meant to celebrate, define, and promote black male urban respectability and sexuality—was limited in its ability to do so because it could not unashamedly and forthrightly discuss black male sexuality or boast of black male superiority directly, and thus, found covert means in constructing black male sexual citizenship. One of the dilemmas *Duke* faced, Nishikawa posited, was that "it tended to address black sexuality as an orbiting signifier around whiteness: that is, instead of being seen on its own terms, black sexual conduct always had to have one eye on what white people would say about it." Although there may be some validity to Nishikawa's supposition—that Burley needed to be concerned with how black sexuality was perceived by the white establishment—one of the objectives of *Duke* was to decenter whiteness as the controlling variable in defining black masculinity. Therefore, although "whiteness" undoubtedly contributed to *Duke*'s inability to

fully express a black sexual citizenship, other social and political forces were also in play in 1957 that militated against black sexuality moving beyond signifier to full expression.<sup>70</sup>

“A Night of Manhood” was the first short story in the table of contents of the first issue, and its inclusion in *Duke* was notable. In some respects, the piece can be viewed as a coming-of-age-story for black manhood. The denunciation of the mother, domination of black women, and the realization of the limits and repercussions of class mobility speak to the social, cultural, and gender dynamics of black manhood in the 1950s. However, the Chester Himes’s excerpt was decontextualized from its original 1954 form, *The Third Generation*. Indeed, anyone familiar with the novel would wonder why this short story was chosen to appear in *Duke* and be the first short story listed in the table of contents, since Charles, the protagonist, was not characterized as an ivy-minded or a self-made man. In the novel, Charles Taylor was the youngest of three children born to Lillian Taylor, a light-skinned socialite, and Professor Taylor, a dark-skinned educator. Because Charles had a light complexion similar to his mother, Mrs. Taylor placed all of her class aspirations onto her son. However, Charles grew to reject the tenets of black middle-class respectability. His fall down an elevator shaft was just one of the repercussions of this decision. The reason for the accident, which is only known by reading *The Third Generation*, was that Charles had been admiring two white female checkers at his place of employment as he stepped into the elevator and did not notice that the elevator was not actually there. Both “A Night of Manhood” and *The Third Generation* demonstrated a Frazierian ideology regarding the black middle class, given their preoccupation with an artificial world, status, rejection of tradition (or the denial of the parent), and the superficialities of life. In the novel, Charles is viewed as a pathetic character, whereas in the excerpt in *Duke* he is supposed to embody black

---

<sup>70</sup> Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 169.

manhood because he rejected those tenets associated with respectability and the centering of whiteness. As Nishikawa asserted, this was the foundational problem of *Duke*, crafting a magazine on black respectability and consumer culture while also denouncing it.

In “Duke Debut,” there was a brief mention of the “Duchess of the Month,” Eleanor Crews, despite her image being the second largest, next to the mannequin, on the cover. “Duke Debut” commented

In its initial issue Duke is happy to place on display the photographic talents of Elroy Davis, who did the color shots of Duchess Eleanor Crews, the pretty who adorns our cover and regales our readers in the center spread. Davis is a show business veteran as a singer in such musicals as ‘Carmen Jones’ and ‘Lost In The Stars.’ Taking to the camera, he demonstrates his remarkable versatility in glamourizing the fair sex.<sup>71</sup>

Again, it is the black male, Elroy Davis, who was pictured on the second page that readers should be thinking of as they fix their gaze on Eleanor Crews. Although it was Crews on “display,” it was Davis’s versatility and talents that were to be admired and not necessarily Crews’s beauty, versatility, talents or, even body. Again, sex, or even sexuality, was not spoken of, nor was it to be preoccupation of the “real” urbane black man. And yet, the black bodies, male and female, were alluded to literally and figuratively.

Articulating an appreciation for diversity, *Duke* hoped to offer varying “types” of black women to its consumer audience. In each issue there were additional pictorials besides the “Duchess” of the month. Whereas the “Duchess” was portrayed as a “representative,” accessible female—whom any male reader could have the possibility of meeting if he lived in an urban environment—the other pictorials featured women who were professionals in the entertainment industry. Female cabaret entertainer Ilene Day was featured in the premier issue of *Duke* in varying degrees of undress, “showcasing” her talents. The article, “\$300,000 Bosom,” took pride

---

<sup>71</sup> “Duke Debut,” *Duke*, Sept. 1957, 2.

and even jabs at Day's breasts, which were insured by Lloyd's of London. Playing into the belief that black entertainers attained more success and appreciation in Europe, the article focused less on her talent than on the myriad ways her breasts had gotten her job offers and proposals—marriage and otherwise—from a European club owner, to which she smartly declined. Day, similar to many of the unmarried female entertainers who were featured in Cold War magazines, was portrayed as being available, accessible, and submissive—to the right man. According to the piece, Day was not yet ready for marriage; however, she did have an idea about what she was “shopping for,” stating that she was “really quite feminine under all this.” She was waiting for the “right guy to come along” and when he did she would be “a sucker and chuck all of this.” Her suitor would need to be an “intelligent, clean-cut colored man. He can be a garbage collector but if he happens to be a millionaire I won't let such a detail stand in the way of true love.”<sup>72</sup>



Figure 12: Ilene Day. Duke, June 1957.

<sup>72</sup> “\$300,000 Bosom,” *Duke*, June 1957, 66. Actually, this was not really an article. Of the three pages dedicated to Day, there were only six small paragraphs of written text. Most of the article consists of her bending over displaying cleavage. Indeed, no “author” is credited with the article; only the photographer, Ron Spillman, is given credit.

Day's potentially fictional comments highlighted the intersections of class, commodity culture, race, and gender. The purpose of the article was ostensibly to inform *Duke's* readers of the currency—sexual and racial—of Day's breasts. Readers were informed that “her eye-catching upper façade” attracted the attention of Berlin's classiest club owner who offered Day “\$3000 a week for three months, because ‘it [would] be the high spot of [his] career to have [her] wiggle on [his] floor.’” According to the article, Day refused the club owner's offer. However, this did not deter the “eager Teuton beaver” who then “wailed by cable: ‘Okay. Come Over. Marry me. Take 50 per cent of the club's profits for life.’”<sup>73</sup> What was of note, of course, was the power and value of Day's breasts to the German business owner, and, of course, her repudiation of the white entrepreneur. Her twice rejection of him led him to “wail” and offer her half his profits “for life.” The article did not state the value of the club, but one could assume that if the “Teuton beaver” was willing to pay Day \$12,000 a month, then the revenues were hefty. Day's rejection of the white club owner in some ways leads to his emasculation, at least within the article—hence the wailing and willingness to pay her to be his companion.

In most of the article, Day was not the subject but an object. All of the quotes and attention were directed at the German club owner and indirectly referenced her breasts and the power of her sexuality. It was in the next paragraph that Day became a subject, granted disembodied subject, when she informed *Duke* that she was indeed “shopping for” a black man. Day was an active consumer—shopping for a potential husband. She was portrayed as available, and, to her, status and wealth of a potential husband did not matter especially when it came to true love. Her rejection of European businessmen, that is, white men, and her resigning to marry a “millionaire,” if she had to, positioned her as being available to *Duke's* potential readers. Day's

---

<sup>73</sup> “\$300,000 Bosom,” 66.

comments were used to downplay the “value” of her breasts, making more tenable a marriage to a “garbage collector” whose working salary undoubtedly would not be equivalent to the insurable value of her \$300,000 bosoms. The reader was left to assume that she would abandon her cosmopolitan European lifestyle and move back to the United States.

What also lent itself to this notion of accessibility was the space in which these photographs were taken. Although Day was a cabaret performer, there was only one candid shot of her on stage. Nine of the ten images of her portray her in “private” moments. Five of the images show her in a towel in her dressing room grooming herself—including one that seems to show her shaving her legs. The remaining photographs show her posing in an elegant evening gown—which the reader assumed was the gown she would perform in, although the gown was different and more formal than the candid performance picture that was featured within the pictorial. Hence, the pictures seem to be divided into two spheres—the private and the public. The caption that accompanied the pictures that are clearly “private” read, “Ilene Day puts on a better show in her dressing room than in night club spotlight and DUKE’s camera records a backstage session to prove the point.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, *Duke*, and its representatives, had access to Day in private, intimate spaces. In the “private” photographs, again, Day was seen in a barely evident towel used to hide her breasts—breasts that have been appraised and seem to have value and power especially for European males. But for assumed African American readers, Day herself was not powerful; it was her breasts that wielded all the power and if the towel fell and exposed her power then she would be vulnerable. The caption that accompanied the “public” photos reestablished her breasts’ power and in some ways inaccessibility: “Emerging from dressing room, Ilene Day takes inventory before placing it on display for Bond Street playboy.”<sup>75</sup> In the

---

<sup>74</sup> *Duke*, June 1957, 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Duke*, June 1957, 22.

last caption, Day becomes disembodied. The “it” that the caption was referring to, of course, was her breasts.

As disembodied subject, thus denied subjectivities, Day was supposed to project a certain image. To reiterate, Day’s active voice was rarely used; when she did “speak,” she discussed her breasts and men. Although the unidentified author wrote the narrative, it was the photographer who was credited. Day’s dual focus in this article mirrored the images that her photographs project: the public and private. Her breasts, signifiers of her sexuality, were meant for “private view” or black male exclusivity. They were to be contained within the race or the racialized magazine. Publicly she, according to the article, hoped to one day marry a black man and aspire to middle-class sensibilities. Thus, what could be made of this is that it was the image of the black female—sexual and racial—that was of importance in these pictorials.

Cordie King was the pictorial model for the July 1957 issue of *Duke*. In “Private Photo File of a Model,” Burley used the authorial technique that implied that he, and thus *Duke*’s readers, had inside information and “private” access to an entertainer. King, a once aspiring actress and model, had previously done nude modeling as a means of financial support. In this article, *Duke* delicately approached the stigma of nude modeling and its signaling of an aberrant sexuality, which is ironic considering the purpose of *Duke* was to show women posing, albeit semi-nude, for an audience. However, the opening line of the article ameliorated any sexual deviancy on King’s behalf: “Marilyn Monroe did it for \$50. Anita Ekberg agreed to do it because she said she was interested in art. Jayne Mansfield supposedly did it to work her way through college.”<sup>76</sup> By using some of the most famous and sexually desirable white women of the era for

---

<sup>76</sup> *Duke*, July 1957, 13.



comparison, *Duke* attempted to mediate the bomb shell that Cordie King also posed nude. Thus, the editor seemed to query, is posing nude so bad?

Besides attempting to compare her actions to other famous white actresses, *Duke* also wanted to demonstrate that King possessed desirability and respectability, as well as elements of high-brow culture: “Displaying a svelte form fully as shapely as Marilyn Monroe’s in her famous calendar poses, Cordie did a private sitting for a series of revealing figure studies by prominent Chicago glamour photographer Stephen Deutch.”<sup>77</sup> Using language that elevated King’s modeling in the nude to something with more taste and class, *Duke* uplifted King from the sex kitten status of Mansfield and Monroe. The comparisons to Monroe did not end with both women posing nude to jump start their careers; both risked their respective love interests because of their actions. *Duke* made a point in mentioning that Joe DiMaggio, Monroe’s husband, was “annoyed by the nude photos” of Monroe, and Sammy Davis, Jr., who was romantically linked to King after she posed nude, was also troubled by his romantic interest being exposed for other men to see. “The nude photos of Cordie,” the piece insinuated, “pose[d] a threat to her romance with Sammy, who even objected to ordinary cheesecake shots of her.”<sup>78</sup> Despite *Duke*’s striving to make King’s nude modeling career respectable, King, who was known as Mrs. Marion Stewart by the time the old-file footage of her was published in *Duke*, was “reported not very happy over shots in [sic] current issue of the new magazine ‘Duke.’”<sup>79</sup>

For the August pictorial, *Duke* went international and featured Gladys Mora, a Cuban dancer in “Cuba’s Prettiest Anatomy Specimen.” Mora, a former medical student at Havana Institute, was pictorially cast in two different locales—her dressing room and in what seemed to

---

<sup>77</sup> *Duke*, July 1957, 13.

<sup>78</sup> *Duke*, July 1957, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Monroe, “so they say,” 8; Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 170.

be a domestic space. Again, exploiting and overusing the double entendre trope throughout the article, *Duke* attempted to subvert the intelligence of the former medical student by weaving innuendos into the article. The opening caption, “She wanted to be a doctor but Gladys Mora turned to dancing when med students started clinical research on her curves,” was signification and conflation of anatomy and sex.<sup>80</sup>

As with previous pictorial models, *Duke* demonstrated the intelligence and power of these women, but within limits—by no means could these women be too successful or intelligent to jeopardize the gender hierarchy. The article sought to undermine Mora’s intelligence by informing the reader of “the fact that Gladys was a student herself did not seem to make much difference to her male classmates, whose scholarly research too often seemed intent on closer examination of her physical properties. But Gladys did not go to med school for two years to become an anatomical specimen: she wanted to be a doctor.”<sup>81</sup> Yet, the sexual attention from her male colleagues, the article suggested, was what led Mora to pursue a career in dance where she could legitimately expose her anatomy. According to Mora, “The male half of the class took more interest in my anatomy than in the specimens provided for the study. I found dancing less of a mental effort, and so I decided to become a dancer instead of doctor.”<sup>82</sup> It is noteworthy that her decision to leave medical school and become an entertainer was directly connected to men finding her desirable and viewing her as a sex object. The reader does not learn whether Mora had practiced dance or if she was dancing while also a medical student. Dancing and alluring sexuality seemed to be innate characteristics of the Cuban former medical students, whereas the rigors of medical schools seemed to be too taxing.

---

<sup>80</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 12

<sup>81</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 12.

<sup>82</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 12.

Mora, similar to Day, was portrayed as an exhibitionist, who enjoyed the attention of men. Although characterized as worldly and possessing sexual power, Mora, the article alluded, would subordinate her physical and mental potency to men. In recalling her opportunity to stand-in for the lead showgirl who had taken ill, Mora, who had “hurried[ly] struggle[ed] into the unfamiliar, revealing dress, stated, ‘I couldn’t understand the applause, until I looked down—and realized that I’d put the dress on back-to-front. I stood stock still and waited for the curtain to come down. My ... that applause.’”<sup>83</sup>

Sexual accessibility seemed to be the subtext in Mora’s pictorial. Male readers were informed that “Since the time an exuberant American climbed on the stage and slapped her bottom, Miss Glamor has perfected her own brand of self-defense.” Mora informed her male readers that her brand of “self-defense” was “not ju-jitsu” or any other method of combat to fight off unwanted advances. Instead, when she was on stage, she adjusted her “dance steps to keep out of their clutches,” offering that, “I am an expert dodger. I doubt whether even an experienced tackle could get his hands on me.”<sup>84</sup> Mora’s comment seemed less like a strategy and more like a dare considering the context of the article. Since Mora had already been constructed as a temptress, her passive dodging of would-be gropers seemed to place her sexuality in the realm of sport. The individual who protected Mora financially and physically was her manager, Arturo Guida. Guida, accustomed to seeing the rowdiness of men who had become “Mora-stricken,” would watch them “with amused tolerance.” According to the article, “he’s been around the Cuban conquest long enough to know, with his barometer-like accuracy, the effect she has on male blood-counts. And his practiced eye can tell just what kind of business theater moguls have

---

<sup>83</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 14.

<sup>84</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 14.

in mind when they suggest a contract for Miss Glamor.”<sup>85</sup> Mora furthered, “If it wasn’t for Arturo, I’d have found myself tied to some pretty sticky engagements. There seem to be more wolves in show business than in any other racket.”<sup>86</sup> Again, it was a man, in this case, a Latino, who rescued Mora from (European) wolves who did not have her best interests in mind. Mora, unlike most of the pictorial models featured in *Duke*, was apparently not looking for a future husband. In fact, her article did not intimate any domestic qualities at all. She appeared to be a woman who was not wife material and too sexually aggressive or foreign for the role of the wife of an African American male.

Mary Frances Berry discussed the “sometimes devastating consequence of looking,” as it applied to Matt Ingram. In her article, she used theories advanced by Laura Mulvey in a 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” as her launching point. According to Berry, “Mulvey suggested a world ordered by sexual imbalance, with pleasure in looking, split between active/male and passive/female. Using psychoanalysis, she proposed that the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.” Berry further contended that,

in their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. The concept of the gaze is based on the relationship between pleasure and images. Mulvey argued that Hollywood cinema offered images geared toward male viewing pleasure, which she read within certain psychoanalytic paradigms, including “scopophilia” and voyeurism. In psychoanalysis, the term scopophilia refers to pleasure in looking while not being seen, and carries a more negative connotation of a powerful, if not sadistic, position.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 14.

<sup>86</sup> *Duke*, August 1957, 14.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Frances Berry, “‘Reckless Eyeballing’: The Matt Ingram Case and the Denial of African American Sexual Freedom,” *Journal of African American History* (Spring, 2008), 224.

When it comes to the gaze, Mulvey stated that the male gaze projected his fantasies onto the female image. These pictorials, however, limit the voyeuristic fantasy. For example, in Day's pictorial, value, literally, is placed on breast—\$300,000. Although the reader is allowed to see Day in several poses of (un)dress—there are three types of poses for her: the barely toweling-covered with nearly exposed breast; in an evening gown directing attention to her breasts; and that of the cabaret performer. In the latter image, Day was surrounded by other performers—white men. Thus, the presumed, black gazer is limited in his fantasy. There are no pictures of Day in a domestic space partnered with an imagined respectable black man.

Berry asserted that the gaze can take on a variety of forms from “voyeuristic, sadistic, assaultive, loving, passionate, policing, normalizing, or inspecting,” hence expanding as well as complicating Mulvey's claim that the gaze was always a negative. And I would argue that these pictorials are not solely about voyeuristic pleasure—the pleasure of looking while not being seen—but voyeurism as also allowing the possibility of constructing a self in relation to subject. In this instance what is being created is a space for black male sexuality and the opportunity to look without repercussion and to be represented as a sexual citizen.

The first issue of *Duke* featured the centerfold—the Duchess of the Month—Eleanor Crew, who bore a remarkable resemblance to the black femme fatale of that era, Eartha Kitt. The viewer sees the “Eartha” look-a-like in several poses, most of them topless with her arms over her breasts. In the August issue of *Duke*, a reader wrote in making reference to the similarities:

I saw your new mag on the newsstands and just glancing through it decided to buy it. After reading it from cover to cover and looking at your luscious models who were shown on several pages, I was glad to have bought it. May I make a suggestion which is: perhaps you could interest the wonderful “Eartha Kitt” to pose... . She is a great favorite of mine and possibly of many others of both white and colored races. I am white myself but enjoy your mag and models shown in it.... Eleanor Crews sure is a lovely girl and I hope you have

many more Duchesses as nice as her and again I think “Eartha Kitt” would be wonderful Duchess to show in your mag.<sup>88</sup>

Burley and his editorial staff obviously knew what men, both black and white, wanted to see in a “girlie” magazine. Many of the women chosen to be pictorial models or the Duchess appeared to be light-skinned black women. *Duke*’s August issue featured a blonde Duchess of the Month, Cosetta White. At first glance and because of the black and white print of the magazine, she could easily be mistaken for white. It was through the mediated gaze (African-American magazine) and a comment within the layout, “*our* girls are going for the blonde locks in the beauty parlor,” that a spectator would quickly be snapped back into reality.<sup>89</sup> Yet it was not just the appearance of a seemingly white centerfold in *Duke*, which would have still been considered racially taboo in the late 1950s, that would catch the spectator off guard, but who the woman resembled—Marilyn Monroe.

Throughout the layout, what seemed to have captivated the lens was the woman’s skin color, breasts, and hair. The photo spread began with the young eighteen-year-old on the city streets smoking a cigarette and wearing a coat, an image used to conjure her sophistication and a cosmopolitan allure. The layout then went from the public sphere to the private sphere. The viewer witnessed her sitting on a couch, legs crossed, with a row of pictures on a peg-board behind her. Although the individuals pictured in the photographs may not be *her* family pictures, they are most definitely familiar. The first image that the camera captured in the background was that of a young white male-child and the next was that of a dog. The last picture was that of a sophisticated-looking white male. The blonde model foregrounded all of these images.

---

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Ray DeSel, *Duke*, Aug. 1957, 4.

<sup>89</sup> “Meet the Blonde Duchess,” *Duke*, Aug. 1957, 34. Emphasis added.

Surprisingly, there is not a picture of a white female that would have completed this family portrait; that role, of course, was assumed by the “black” Marilyn. The next photographs in the August pictorial showed the model combing her hair. This was the only picture in the first three issues of *Duke* of a woman paying any attention to her hair. The spectator was forced to notice her hair and, possibly, envy or desire it. Although this woman’s hair was short, “blonde locks” was used to describe and invoke an image of a cascading mane.

The centerfold image of the black “Blonde Duchess” was quite striking. It was the first “color” picture that was presented, and it was the first time that the lens allowed the spectator to see that she was indeed a light-skinned black woman. Because the picture was in color, or possibly because of the lighting, she appeared “washed-out,” in need of color. The red lipstick and toenail polish were not complimentary to her skin tone, but she was obviously wearing it to complete the image.



She was wearing a white sheer robe, revealing cleavage and her pale skin. However, *Duke* did not want the viewer to forget that although she looked white, she most definitely was not. The last photograph had her with one knee in a chair, the other leg fully extended on the floor, similar to a warrior’s pose. The fur wrap conspicuously draped around her, covered her breast and pelvic region, and vying for the spectator’s gaze was a huge metallic-looking African mask positioned next to her in the background.

The picture where she was constructed as a warrior princess undoubtedly was meant to invoke an “Africanness” and a primitiveness. As a woman of African descent, she was “safe” for black men to fantasize about and even indulge in “reckless eyeballing.” There would be no repercussions, physical, psychological, or cultural, for him to imagine himself with her, or if fates allowed, find someone with similar attributes and have her be his partner. And because she was of African descent, she embodied all the sexual stereotypes attributable to black women—uncontrollable passion and animalistic sexual behavior—signified by her warrior stance and the fur she wore. For the “ivy-minded” man, Marilyn (the white one) was the ideal. She epitomized sexuality—her bosom, her curves, her hair, and her face all came to represent female sexual representation. But since the “ivy-minded” black man could not have the real Marilyn Monroe, he could substitute the black Marilyn for the original. Reader Godfrey Dunmore, however, felt that *Duke* failed at its attempt to “make the model desirable or alluring.” Dunmore was dismayed by the layout that had White in a bathroom “sitting ‘on a cheap wash bowl,’ as if spied ‘in the preparation of her glamor [sic],’” with a Kleenex box placed within view. As Nishikawa explained, “Dunmore claimed his fantasy-ideal had been quashed. Rather than help him dream about the model. . . the photo. . . only reminded him of her shoddy surroundings.” Dunmore, according to Nishikawa, preferred that the Duchess in *Duke* not be accessible or be representative but “should be surrounded by elegant props. Sports cars, furs, jewelry, excellent furnishing—in short, things the average guy can’t afford to buy.”<sup>90</sup>

In addition to semi-nude women gracing the pages of *Duke* to mediate black masculine desire, Burley also included articles on sports. In the June issue, Burley wrote an article on

---

<sup>90</sup> Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 175–76.



boxing titled the “Fight Factory.” Some of the language in the article and the accompanying images bordered on the homoerotic:

The Long Line of naked brown, black, white and yellow boys pass in review under the murky light of the small medical room before the shirt-sleeved lanky, bespectacled doctor for the Illinois Athletic Commission.<sup>91</sup>

The series of photographs captured boxer Eddie Allen on the urban streets of Chicago and at the Joe Louis Gym. The Allen pictorial, similar to the illustrations that featured women, depicted him in public and in intimate spaces. Allen’s intimate or private space, however, was presumably the gym, which was also his place of work. Readers of *Duke* and fans of Allen witnessed him laying face-down, shirtless, on a flat bench, with his arms extended outward. Another image portrayed him slightly reclining on the edge of the boxing ring, leaning back against the ropes with his legs only slightly spread. He was wearing casual attire and draped with his boxing mitts. He is pictured with two pair of boxing gloves (four mitts); however, only three mitts were visible—one glove on each leg and one glove between his legs. The other glove is hidden over his shoulder. The image seemed to link black male strength and power with black male sexuality. Another image has him in the locker room, almost nude, preparing to put on his pants. He was pictured from the side, his leg raised and bent. The pose unapologetically demanding that the reader acknowledge the black male body and its strength. Thus, *Duke*, compared to the black press of the 1930s, explicitly called for the appreciation of the black male body and by extension black male sexuality. It proclaimed, in a singular vision, that the black man was sexual, strong, and powerful. The black male body and sexuality was exposed and uncontained. It was fully exposed for all to see, even white men. Thus, it was possible that the button-eyed mannequin that graced all the covers of *Duke*, except the last issue, represented a wink—Burley’s cunning way

---

<sup>91</sup> Dan Burley, “Fight Factory,” *Duke*, June 1957, 46.

of teasing the spectator, and subversively stating, “I made you look,” “I made you think about a black *sexualized* man”?

The published feedback that the editors of *Duke* received overall was positive. Men and women were happy to see a “Negro” version of *Playboy*, *Escapade*, *Gent*, and *Nugget*, but without the “filth.”<sup>92</sup> Most of the letters were accolades to the editor and founder of *Duke*. Burley’s notoriety allowed for “free” publicity of his latest venture. The “Dear Duke” section of the magazine was filled with letters from popular black celebrities and leaders of that era, including boxers Archie Moore and Jersey Joe Walcott, musician Louis Jordan, and Val Washington, director of the Republican National Committee.<sup>93</sup> Alongside these messages were letters and pleas from average readers. A gentleman requested that the magazine not discuss contemporary topics such as lynching and racism, stating that he reads about those topics in the “colored weeklies.”<sup>94</sup> He preferred, instead, that *Duke* pattern itself after the other “big magazines,” which could be understood as *Playboy*. *Duke*, for Wilson, was an escapist medium from the world around him. He was overjoyed that there was a magazine for blacks, but he did not want to be reminded of black oppression. Another letter, from a woman, made a slightly different request of *Duke*. Arlene Somers wanted *Duke* to feature models that were more realistic. She expressed her disappointment in magazines that featured women who were “baby-faced school girls” or “old hags.” She was looking for representation.<sup>95</sup>

Several readers were also displeased with *Duke*’s choice of light-skinned women as the Duchess. One letter writer commented that “the temptresses of the month are not sexy looking and colorful enough,” as did a woman from Los Angeles, Rena Love, who found *Duke*’s light-

---

<sup>92</sup> Dear Duke, “Letter from Mildred Toliver,” *Duke*, July 1957, 4.

<sup>93</sup> “Letter from Mildred Toliver,” 4.

<sup>94</sup> Dear Duke, “Letter from Horace Wilson,” *Duke*, July 1957, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Dear Duke, “Letter from Arlene Somers,” *Duke*, July 1957, 4.

skinned selection of Duchesses unsatisfactory and requested “dark skinned girls as Duchess.” A few readers also took umbrage with the sanitization of black sexuality. Langston Hughes, in his column for the *Chicago Defender*, “A Few Little Things That Negroes Need,” observed that *Duke*’s cover models, as each subsequent issue was released, were “gradually being more and more dressed up. The young lady on ‘Duke’s’ first cover had on nothing at all,” Hughes commented, “but on the third cover, the girl was clothed almost to the armpits! It is worth watching to see what will happen next.” A reader from Detroit expressed dissatisfaction with the magazine “soft-pedaling the sex” in the fiction they printed. Still, he was willing to forgive this misstep if “the pictorials kept improving” and “forgive [Duke’s] de-sexed fiction.” Journalist John Lash corroborated *Duke*’s self-expressed apoliticism when Lash wrote that *Duke* was just a modern-day “minstrel-show stereotype of the American Negro.”<sup>96</sup>

Despite Burley’s assertion and Lash’s criticism, *Duke*, given its stylistic format and its target audience, was a political medium focusing on constructing a distinct black masculinity. Burley, himself, was explicit on this point: “*Duke* will strive to cater to the sophisticated, urbane tastes of our ivy-minded males who have advanced fully enough so that virility is more than a word and adult truly connotes manhood in all its glories.”<sup>97</sup> By daring individuals to reimagine black sexuality in the public sphere as non-deviant but as celebratory, Burley was making a political statement. However, even without specifically focusing on black male virility, *Duke* only lasted six issues, with the last issue featuring Duke Ellington on the cover. *Duke*, for the most part, according to Nishikawa, was financially successful. Nishikawa pointed out in his article that *Duke* “evinced long-term plans for success in the periodical market to the end. Its

---

<sup>96</sup> Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 175; Langston Hughes, “A Few Little Things That Negroes Need,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 31, 1957, 10; John Lash, “The Conditioning of Servitude: A Critical Summary of Literature by and about Negroes in 1957, Part II,” *Phylon Quarterly*, 19.3.

<sup>97</sup> Lash, “The Conditioning of Servitude,” 3.

cover price of fifty cents and subscription rates (\$6.00 for one year, \$11.00 for two),” had it on par with its competitors, and its overseas subscription rate fee of an additional \$3.00, presumed there would be a demand from soldiers abroad. Burns also attested that Duke’s “average monthly sales in excess of \$30,000, [was] considered promising for a new publication.” However, he admitted that “tardy payments by distributors helped to speed our demise.” Yet, as Burns alluded, tardy payments were not the sole cause of the publication’s end. Nishikawa hypothesized that Duke’s conflicting message within the magazine quite literally contained “interclass debate.” Whereas *Duke* tried editorially to maintain a semblance of respectability and black middle-class consumerism in constructing an urbane black male, it often betrayed its intention with its choice of fiction and articles.

Nishikawa asserted, “wedded to highbrow determination of taste, *Duke* did little to advance black consumer spending, or to frame those habits as properly ‘masculine.’” Articles that focused on black men as consumers often described their participation through “feminizing discourse.” Citing Burley’s article, “Evolution of the Conk” as an example, Nishikawa noted Burley’s debasing tone in reporting on the trend of black men patronizing male beauty parlors. Nishikawa remarked how Burley “accus[ed] the men’s salon of cultivating superficial personality traits among its patrons: the hairdos, manicures, and facials all add up to a ‘massaging of vanity and ego,’ a cult of inessential beauty aids and ‘hair worship.’” The images and captions that accompanied the article also feminized black men who were interested in enjoying the “good life.” The image of a black man underneath a hair dryer showed him with his eyes closed and mouth slightly ajar, as if in a blissful retreat. He is wearing a beauty salon cape with images of white women. The caption that appeared next to the photograph read, “Once strictly for milady, hair dryer has been appropriated by males to become symbol of ultimate hair

styling.” Nishikawa’s analysis of the article, the photograph, and Burley’s impression of black male consumer citizens compared it to that of “femininity and white womanhood.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, readers wanted more sensationalism and sexuality and did not endorse what the publishers considered ivy-minded black sexual citizenship. That *Duke* could not resolve the melding of high- and low-brow culture in constructing black masculinity was just another possibility for its failure.

Five years after *Duke*’s demise, *Playboy*’s African American readership continued to rise. According to Bryer, *Playboy*’s African American readership rose between 1962-1966.<sup>99</sup> The steady increase in African American readership, suggested for some scholars, that *Playboy*’s racial liberalism, and the packaging of itself as “entertainment for men” where masculinity and sexuality trumped race, was an appeal for black male readers, offering an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the *Playboy* lifestyle. Or, it could mean that although there was a dormant audience for *Duke*, the spotlight on and representation of black male sexual citizenship could not easily be wedded with the predominant public image of the respectable black male who occupied television screens, protest rallies, and pulpits. Nevertheless, the next known black girlie magazine, *Players: For the Progressive Male*, was not published until 1973. Similar to *Duke*, who qualified its purpose by catering to the “ivy-minded males who have advanced fully enough so that virility is more than a word,” *Players*, in its subtitle, too, needed to carve out a niche in attempting to construct a black male sexual citizen.

After *Duke*, Burley continued in the publishing industry. Whereas in his earlier writings Burley promoted integration and exalted the black race, it appeared in his later work he endorsed the teaching of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. In his tribute to Burley, Doc Young

---

<sup>98</sup> Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 162–63.

<sup>99</sup> Bryer, “Representing the Nation,” 126.

wrote that Burley “did not hold to all the ‘orthodox’ ideas about the ‘race situation.’”<sup>100</sup> Burley, who was known to glorify Marcus Garvey and considered him a great man, began to “[trumpet] the cause of the Black Muslim...[and] his columns often berated Negroes mercilessly.”<sup>101</sup>

It is not known exactly when Burley became involved with the Nation of Islam or its leader, Elijah Muhammad, who was also a transplant to Chicago and undeniably self-made having established the Nation of Islam. Perhaps it was only for professional reasons, since at the time of his employment Burley was married to his second wife who was white, as were his two stepchildren. Muhammad wanted to develop his own newspaper that would spread his message of black empowerment and self-determinism. Although the black press helped spread his teachings, Muhammad believed that the images and the messages contained within the pages of black newspapers were “ruining our younger generation to the extent that it is now a near-tragedy.”<sup>102</sup> With an already existing national readership, Muhammad proceeded to create his own vehicle to disseminate his message concerning black empowerment and religion. He assembled a team of men—Dan Burley, Minister Abdul Allah Muhammad, and Malcolm X—to help him create the newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, which debuted in 1961.<sup>103</sup>

In 1965, three years after Burley’s death, Elijah Muhammad’s book, *Message to the Blackman in America*, was published. The foreword, “The Truth About Muhammad,” was written by Burley. In it, Burley defended the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and compared him to Marcus Garvey. Burley lambasted journalists whom he felt distorted Muhammad’s teachings.

---

<sup>100</sup> Young, “The Legend of Dan Burley,” 77.

<sup>101</sup> Young, “The Legend of Dan Burley,” 77.

<sup>102</sup> Young, “The Legend of Dan Burley,” 77.

<sup>103</sup> According to Askia Muhammad, Malcolm X had published his own newspapers in 1960, entitled *Mr. Muhammad Speaks*; However, this was a local newspaper in New York. See Askia Muhammad, “Muhammad Speaks, A Trailblazer in the Newspaper Industry,” *Final Call*, Oct. 30, 2009. [http://www.finalcall.com/national/savioursday2k/m\\_speaks.htm](http://www.finalcall.com/national/savioursday2k/m_speaks.htm).

Although he held great disdain for white reporters who misrepresented Muhammad, his ire was focused on “the stooge Negro reporters for white papers sent into Muhammad [sic] meetings to ‘stool pigeon’ for the whites who are not admitted” and who compared the Nation to hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan or the White Council.<sup>104</sup> He lambasted the hypocrisy of the press campaigning for criticizing the NOI but not white supremacist groups.

Burley also criticized black leaders who did not support Muhammad’s message. He denounced the black preachers who privately agreed with Muhammad’s message but were afraid to say so publicly. Burley suggested these preachers were “less[er]” men since they were afraid to be identified with Muhammad. Burley ridiculed those black leaders who concentrated their efforts on improving the condition of the middle class and dismissed the needs of the illiterate and impoverished. He constructed a caricature of the black leader, describing him as

big and imposing and has a fat well-fed appearance; he wears expensive clothes and is always immaculate; he smokes big fat cigars...he is typed by the costly liquors he orders, the make of automobile he drives, and the wide swath he cuts at interracial parties and affairs where the black and white sit down to “talk this thing over.”<sup>105</sup>

Burley further noted whenever this “stereotypical” black leader was mentioned in the press his biographical information was also included as a way of introducing him to readers, credentialing him and proving he had the middle-class values to be a black leader. It is interesting that the same man that Burley constructs as a villain is the same man, a few years earlier Burley thought represented Black progress and integration.

Burley was less harsh regarding the black populace who had been “egged” into believing in integration and debasing themselves by attending “lily-white churches” to disprove that

---

<sup>104</sup> Muhammad, “Muhammad Speaks,” xxi.

<sup>105</sup> Muhammad, “Muhammad Speaks,” xxi.

“‘Eleven o’clock on Sunday is America’s most segregated hour.’”<sup>106</sup> Instead, Burley, the son of a Baptist evangelist, placed blame on African American leaders, preachers, whites, and the Christian church for keeping blacks in a position of servitude.

In the foreword, Burley not only explained Muhammad, he glorified him. Burley wrote that Muhammad “stands a ‘12 foot’ 5 feet 6 inches. For what he might lack in height, he makes up in inner power and dedication to what to him is a twentieth century ‘holy crusade’”<sup>107</sup> Burley seemed particularly impressed with Muhammad’s commitment to racial solidarity and advocacy for blacks who were illiterate, impoverished, or in dire-straits. He commented that Muhammad communicated to them in a language that they could understand:

What he writes is told in the language of the little fellow so there can be no mistake or confusion of purpose or shades of meaning. This phase of his writing is undertaken daily with the help of highly trained and dedicated young women secretaries.<sup>108</sup>

Of course history would reveal the irony of this passage, that these “dedicated young women” were more than secretaries to Muhammad. One wonders if Burley had lived long enough to discover that Muhammad, too, had a “back door,” would he still have held him in such high regard?

In July 1962, *The Owl*, Burley’s last known foray as editor in the newspaper industry, was published.<sup>109</sup> Billed as the “World’s 1<sup>st</sup> Real Compact Tabloid,” Burley’s new publication relied on some proven methods that had worked for him in the past. His newspaper reported on entertainment, sports, music, gossip, and, of course jazz. He also included some of his prose as he had with *Duke*. And, in *The Owl*, he defended, yet again, Elijah Muhammad. Burley agreed

---

<sup>106</sup> Muhammad, “Muhammad Speaks,” xvi.

<sup>107</sup> Muhammad, “Muhammad Speaks,” xxii.

<sup>108</sup> Muhammad, “Muhammad Speaks,” xxiv.

<sup>109</sup> *The Owl*, July 14, 1962.



with some that Muhammad was a “dangerous” man—but for an entirely different reason. Burley continued to stress his racial view, his support for Muhammad, and Muhammad’s message for black racial leadership. In both pieces, Burley asserted that this slight man is more of a black man than the current black leaders because he speaks his mind and advocates for black solidarity and separatism.

On October 29, 1962, a few months after he began publishing *The Owl*, Burley died in Chicago. His death, like his funeral, did not arouse much fanfare, which was surprising for a man who had spent thirty years in journalism. In his tribute to Burley, Doc Young speculated why so few people attended Burley’s funeral, chalking it up to either his family not contacting all of his friends or that his radical views may have alienated him from most of his friends. The few tributes and obituaries that were published after Burley’s death described him as a great journalist and jazzman. Few mentioned his endeavors that were not as successful, such as *Duke*, *Salaam*, *Diggeth Thou?*, *The Owl*, and another magazine, *Jive*. Only one mentioned his association with the Nation of Islam.<sup>110</sup>

Burley and *Duke* were examples of what it meant to reimagine and reconceptualize black masculinity. In *The Making of the New Negro*, Anna Pochmara, in her examination and framing of black masculinity as imagined via Harlem Renaissance writers, argued that “black writers appropriate[d] and [rewrote] dominant gender ideologies to construct their masculine identity.” She further added that “although hegemonic ideologies exclude black men,” black men “inevitably” had to “appropriate” these models in order to “assert” their masculinity.<sup>111</sup> Maybe.

---

<sup>110</sup> *New York Beacon*, Nov. 21, 2001 (Vol. 8, No. 46).

<sup>111</sup> Anna Pochmara, *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2011), 10, 11.

As “Pulling Down the House and Tearing Up the Yard” demonstrated, cultural producers were invested in creating distinct models of black masculinity; models that articulated a race consciousness and modernity but were also imbued with a black specificity. This was what the writer for “Quo Vadis” and “If We Must Follow” was trying to impart in his/her *Amsterdam News* editorial when she/he “expressed hope that the colored man in America would retain his racial identity and not go the downward road with the Caucasian.”<sup>112</sup> The representation of African American manliness needed to reflect black men as on par with whites, yet who were crafted under and shaped by different circumstances.

The reimagining, reconceptualizing, and even policing of black masculinity were most certainly rooted in citizenship and the acquisition of racial equality. Moreover, the legacy and the possibilities of blackness created a distinct, yet equal, masculinity within the cultural, political, and social sphere. In that respect, Burley and other journalists and publishers discussed within these pages were symbolic of the button eye on the cover of *Duke*. From month to month the button was never in the same place. On one issue it was on the right side of the face, in another issue, it was on the left; it was unpredictable, creative, and migratory. Thus one interpretation of the one-button eye as it relates to Burley, *Duke*, and, ultimately, black masculinity is that *Duke* represented a black masculinity that could not wed or coexist with what it perceived to be all of the best attributes of black manhood—the alchemizing of the old Negro and the new Negro. As Nishikawa observed, Burley “lamented the waning of southern mores in the urban North.”<sup>113</sup> The historical imperative of black masculinity, it seems, is that it had to emasculate the old, or rather “Uncle Tom” it, in order to reimagine the new. In order for Joe Louis to be representative man, Jack Johnson needed to be silenced.

---

<sup>112</sup> “If We Must Follow,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 3, 1923, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Nishikawa, “Race, Respectability,” 163.

Next, similar to the one-button eye moving from the left side of the face to the right, from month to month, refusing to follow convention, Burley also refused to remain static and predictable. His knowledge of journalism and the types of news he covered were vast, his friendships and the people he associated with were many and contradictory, and his endeavors—from music to publishing—were varied. Burley, similar to the eye, kept his spectators guessing. Yet, in one final interpretation, maybe it is not the one-button eye the spectator should be focused on, but the space in which the spectator knows a button (an eye) should be. Does that empty space represent a closed eye, a wink perhaps? The wink, similar to jive, is coded, yet it is unspoken. It is a signifier that relied on text, context, and subtext to be understood. Thus, for the reader or spectator who picked up *Duke* and flipped through its pages, there was an unspoken understanding that this was a magazine that was trying to depict a different type of black masculinity, one that was cool and urbane; one that lamented the loss of the old and looked forward to the possibilities of the new. Thus, the wink represented an acknowledgement—a recognition—of a new type of black masculinity.

## Conclusion

In this new millennium the black press has changed profoundly. For most of the twentieth century the black press was in a print format, with many of the newspapers publishing on a weekly basis. Newer technologies have allowed for readers to receive the press in both print and electronic, or e-news, formats. However, the high cost of maintaining a newspaper, the decrease in readership, the evolution of “corporate buyouts,” and the desire to continue the historic legacy of the black press has resulted in a majority of the black newspapers being owned by a single company. The *Chicago Defender*, the *Atlanta Daily World*, and the *New Pittsburgh Courier* are now part of Real Time Media, and the *New York Amsterdam News* is part of the conglomerate, The African American News and Information Consortium. The electronic information age has made it possible for the creation of other online news sources that target African Americans: The Root and Black America Web, to name just two. In addition to news outlets, social media plays a role in the dissemination of news and in forging a communal space by which cultural, political, and social values are outlined and contested—often with a touch of humor. With so many news sources and such a proliferation of information, Facebook, black twitter, and a host of blogs help “filter” and process the news for “friends” and “followers.” Because of social media, information that might have otherwise been missed has garnered attention and concerted political and legal action. Social media is the new social movement.

When pressed (pressured) to evaluate the status of black masculinity in this new millennium, not much has really changed; the dialogical paradigm of the re-creation of the New Negro and the Uncle Tomming of the old remains. Additionally, black manhood continues to be reimagined, reconceptualized, and performed by those most invested in its representation. Mark Anthony Neal, professor and public intellectual, has discursively remade the new New Negro

several times. His essay, “Confessions of a ThugNiggaIntellectual,” modernized Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth” model of black masculinity. Neal was inspired to write his essay based on the criticism that Professor Todd Boyd received on his book, *The New H. N. I. C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip-Hop*, in which Boyd argued that hip-hop, “as a legitimate social movement, has usurped the influence of the Civil Rights Movement and become the ‘new head niggas in charge.’” It was “Boyd’s willingness to roll up hard on Civil Rights era stalwarts and the courteous contentions of the Academy” that Neal found valuable.<sup>1</sup>

In his essay, Neal maintained that there is a “generation of black male scholars who are redefining the style and influence of the traditional black male intellectual; a figure that has been influenced throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century by figures like W. E. B. DuBois (sic), Richard Wright. . . and most recently Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West.” This generation of academics, which include Boyd, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Dwight McBride, “are responsible for creating a new space within the academy and the public sphere for black masculinity to exist as a vibrant, vivacious, virile, and versatile entity.” Therefore, these scholars “have given rise for young black men to re-imagine themselves within the context of the academy.” The work and presence of these aforementioned, hip-hop-influenced scholars led to the representation and reconceptualization of what it meant to be a member of the Talented Tenth and allowed Neal to think of himself as a “ThugNiggaIntellectual.”<sup>2</sup>

Similar to Burley’s articles that were often coded in jive, Neal, too, relied on hidden transcripts in this essay, signifying and writing in a slang spoken and understood by the hip-hop community. Acknowledging that he was not a “thug” and rejected the status of “nigger,” Neal

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, “Confessions of a ThugNiggaIntellectual,” Mar. 27, 2003.

[www.popmatters.com/column/criticalnoire030327/](http://www.popmatters.com/column/criticalnoire030327/)

<sup>2</sup> Neal, “ThugNiggaIntellectual,” Mar. 27, 2003.

admitted that his brand of “New York styled black masculinity” was an indication that he had known some thugs “and a bunch of ‘niggers.’” Furthermore, his comportment and attire discursively marked him as such. He wrote that “I share space with them each time I’m profiled in grocery stores, or chillin’ with my homies Gramsci and Jay Z at Starbuck’s. Folks are seemingly fearful and disgusted at my presence, as if a nigga ain’t supposed to drink some expensive coffee and have a laptop.” Neal’s awareness of shared space, history, and similar mapping and reading of the black male bodies and the meanings attached to it is reminiscent of Burley’s essay “5:15 to Suburbia,” in which the black businessman, despite his affluence, is still relegated to “nigger.”<sup>3</sup>

The ThugNiggaIntellectual navigates two worlds: the academic and the street. He recognizes that “the truth that [he] ain’t even supposed to [be] in academe,” and his work is constantly being informed by the latter. Neal situated himself as “part of the first generation of black scholars who, like Rakim, ‘came in the door’ with designs to do the kinds of scholarly work that was deeply personal to us—writing about black everyday life and the cultures that are embedded in those [sic] life.” Yet, Neal recognizes his privilege even as he tries to “keep it real.” He is far from the hood he performs, and is not sure if his scholarship “impacts the lives of ‘Pookie’ and ‘Nay-Nay,’ who are not simply ‘texts’ to be deconstructed and critiqued.” In the classroom, he models this new New Negro, or the “black intellectual etiquette” of the ThugNiggaIntellectual to his black students with whom translation of “black ghetto vernacular” is rarely needed. Ultimately, though, this new reconceptualization of the Talented Tenth is an emancipation from “some dated Victorian-era version of black intellectual life—an era when

---

<sup>3</sup> Neal, “ThugNiggaIntellectual,” Mar. 27, 2003.

folks had to act and dress as if they were above the world, in order to be taken seriously by their white (and black) peers in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

In 2005, Neal again reimagined black masculinity with his book, *New Black Man*. In his polemic, Neal asserted that *New Black Man* “celebrates...new visions of black masculinity not beholden to conservative and essentialist notions of how black men should act in American society, a black masculinity that, for example, takes lessons from the progressive politics of the black feminist movement.” This new New Negro that Neal imagined reconceptualized the archetype of the “‘Strong Black Man,’ a figure that was a product of the imaginations of both the talented-tenth [sic] and rabid black nationalists and Afrocentrists alike,” he argued.

The image of the “Strong Black Man,” Neal asserted, is often threatened, confronted, or destabilized and virtually almost always under attack by black feminism, white supremacy, homophobia, and the hip-hop thug. But these attacks, Neal maintained, “offer possibilities for all black men to rethink their own masculinities and sexualities in order to create more productive relationships within the black community.”<sup>5</sup> As an imagined concept, the “New Black Man,” according to Neal “is a metaphor for an imagined life—a way to be ‘strong’ as a black man in new ways: strong commitment to diversity in our communities, strong support for women and feminism, and strong faith in love and the value of listening.”<sup>6</sup> Similar to how wives, girlfriends, and mothers helped to reshape black manhood, Neal positioned these perceived antitheses to the archetype of strong black masculinity as a way of informing and constructing a new type of black male image.

---

<sup>4</sup> Neal, “ThugNiggaIntellectual,” Mar. 27, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man* (New York, 2005), 65.

<sup>6</sup> Neal, *New Black Man*, xxi, 21, 159.

Similar to the black public intellectual, the black athlete has also gone through some changes. Although he may not be dogged by the legacy of Jack Johnson as much, issues of respectability and containment prevail. The black sportsman is admired for his strength, virility, athleticism, and alleged superiority on the playing field; however, any demonstration of these skills off the court lends itself to harsh criticism. In January 2014, after the Seattle Seahawks defeated the San Francisco 49ers during the National Football League playoff, Seattle's cornerback, Richard Sherman, did the unthinkable—he bragged. Reminiscent of Muhammad Ali or any World Wrestling Federation member, Sherman had the audacity, with fervor, on live television, while being interviewed by a white woman, to say that he was the “best corner in the game!” and mock another player. Sherman's fervor resulted in much criticism and name-calling. He was labeled a thug and a bad sportman. In their reportage, news sources reminded those immediately put-off by Sherman's post-game interview that he was a Stanford graduate—hence, not that “type” of black guy. Sherman also responded to the criticism saying that calling him a “thug” is the new way of saying “nigger.”

African American basketball players similarly restrict their athleticism to the court, and off the court, they model and perform respectability. Often dressed in suits or in jeans and their very own trademarked shoes, they model a metropolitan, modern, preppy, sartorial style potentially accessible to any of their fans and also one that does not make them intimidating. However, on the court, their athleticism, the hard-court urban basketball, and gravity-defying jumps make them forces to be reckoned with. Further, although off the court their bodies are not marked as “hard” or intimidating, but, instead conformist; on the court, the tattoos etched on their bodies quite literally inscribe urbanity, virility, strength, superhumanness, and, in some respects a “thugness.” For certain high-profile individuals, the thug allows for the performance



of a black authenticity within popular culture. And, depending on his economic status, the “thug” can perform respectability, and he can perform “street.” His persona suggests that he is able to navigate high- and low-culture and that he is welcomed and comfortable in both spaces without incident (Met Gala elevators excluded). However, within real, everyday situations, the assumption that black men are thugs, until proven otherwise, results in them continually being policed and contained—literally and figuratively. Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Jordan Davis have also become symbols of black masculinity. Whereas Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, and the black soldiers were demonstrative of ideal black masculinity, and reflected a hope in the actualization of black male inclusion and citizenship, Martin, Davis, and Brown—all black teens—are a testament to its existing improbability.

In prior centuries, African Americans were concerned with black men being able to express and perform their manhood; now, African Americans are worried that their black male teens will not reach the age of manhood. Just as African Americans rallied around Louis and Owens in the 1930s as emblems of black respectability, black masculinity, and the hope of race equality; Blacks, now, have new images they rally around: the hoodie and that of two hands raised with the phrase “hands up, don’t shoot.” Symbolic of the presumed thug and the policing and killing of black male youth, these images reflect the threat to the future of black masculinity. Thus, the business of the construction of black masculinity is the creation of spaces for the ever-changing expression of and threat to blackness. It is informed by and responds to the past and the present conditions of African American society in order to reimagine and preserve a new New Negro.

## Bibliography

### Newspapers

*Amsterdam-Star News*

*Atlanta Daily World*

*Baltimore Afro-American*

*Chicago Defender*

*Chicago Daily Tribune*

*Los Angeles Sentinel*

*Negro World*

*New York Amsterdam News*

*New York Times*

*Pittsburgh Courier*

*Washington Post*

### Periodicals

*Crisis*

*Duke*

*Ebony*

*Sepia*

*Our World*

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Bailey, Beth, and David Farber. "The 'Double-V' Campaign in World War II Hawaii: African Americans, Racial Ideology, and Federal Power." *Journal of Social History* 26 (Summer 1993): 817–43.

Baker, William J. *Jesse Owens: An American Life*. New York: Free Press, 1986.

- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Bell, David, and Joanne Hollows, eds. *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2006.
- Berry, Mary Frances. “‘Reckless Eyeballing’: The Matt Ingram Case and the Denial of African American Sexual Freedom.” *Journal of African American History* 93 (Spring 2008): 223–34.
- Brawley, Sean, and Chris Dixon. “Jim Crow Downunder? African American Encounters with White Australia, 1942–1945.” *Pacific Historical Review* 71(2002): 607–32.
- Brie, H. L. “A Profile of the Black Newspaper: Old Guard Black Journalists Reflect on the Past, Present, and Future.” PhD. diss., University of Iowa 1973.
- Burns, Ben. *Nitty Gritty: A White Editor in Black Journalism*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Carrington, Ben. *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*. London: Sage, 2010.
- Carrington, Ben. “Sport without Final Guarantees: Cultural Studies/Marxism/Sport,” In *Marxism, Cultural Studies, and Sport*, edited by Ben Carrington, and Ian McDonald, 15–31. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Catano, James V. *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2001.
- Catano, James V. “The Rhetoric of Masculinity: Origins, Institutions, and the Myth of the Self-Made Man.” *College English* 52 (1990): 421–36.
- Garvey, Marcus. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. 5, 1922–August 1924*. Edited by R. A. Hill. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Gellman, Erik S. *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Grant, Colin. *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Green, Adam. *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Jefferson, Roland S. “The Black Press: Asset or Liability to Black People?” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 63 (1971): 30–36.
- Jensen, Hilmar Ludvig. “*The Rise of an African American Left: John P. Davis and the National Negro Congress*.” PhD diss., Cornell University, 1997.

- Johnson, John H., and Lerone Bennett, Jr. *Succeeding Against the Odds: The Autobiography of a Great American Businessman*. New York: Johnson Publishing Company, 1992.
- Jordan, William G. *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914–1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Lash, John. “The Conditioning of Servitude: A Critical Summary of Literature by and about Negroes in 1957, Part II.” *Phylon Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1958): 247–57.
- Laucella, Pamela C. “An Analysis of Mainstream, Black, and Communist Press Coverage of Jesse Owens in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games.” PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2004.
- Lentz, Richard. *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King*. Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1990.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Touchstone, 1997.
- Margolick, David. *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink*. New York: Random House, 2005.
- McKay, Claude. *Selected Poems*. New York: Dover Publications, 1999.
- Mead, Chris. *Champion: Joe Louis, Black Hero in White America*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985.
- Myers, Gloria, and A. V. Margavio. “The Black Bourgeoisie and Reference Group Change: A Content Analysis of *Ebony*.” *Qualitative Sociology* 6 (Winter 1983): 291–307.
- Neal, Mark Anthony. *New Black Man*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Neal, Mark A. “Confessions of a ThugNiggaIntellectual.” (2003, March 27). Retrieved from [www.popmatters.com/column/criticalnoire030327/](http://www.popmatters.com/column/criticalnoire030327/)
- Nishikawa, Kinohi. “Race, Respectability, and the Short Life of *Duke Magazine*.” *Book History* 15 (2012): 152–182.
- Owens, Jesse, and Paul G. Neimark. *Jesse, a Spiritual Biography*. Plainfield: Logos International, 1978.
- Pochamara, Anna. *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.
- Runstedtler, Theresa E. “In Sports the Best Man Wins: How Joe Louis Whipped Jim Crow.” In *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Amy Bass, 48–94. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Sammons, Jeffrey T. *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

- Simmons, Charles A. *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827–1965*. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1998.
- Sklaroff, Lauren Rebecca. “Constructing G. I. Joe Louis: Cultural Solutions to the 'Negro Problem' during World War II.” *Journal of American History* 89 (2002): 958–83.
- Summers, Martin. *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900–1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Thompson, Lisa B. *Beyond the Black Lady: Sexuality and the New African American Middle Class*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.
- Tygiel, Jules. *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Waters, Enoch P. *American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1987.
- White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894–1994*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999.
- Wiggins, David K., and Patrick B. Miller. “Introduction.” In *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*, edited by David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, 1–6. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Wiggins, William H., Jr. “Joe Louis: American Folk Hero.” In *Sports and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth Century America*, edited by Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins, 127–146. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Wiggins, William H., Jr. “Boxing’s Sambo Twins: Racial Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908 to 1938.” *Journal of Sport History* 15 (Winter 1988): 242–54.
- Williams, Megan E. “‘Meet the Real Lena Horne’: Representation of Lena Horne in *Ebony* Magazine, 1945–1949.” *Journal of American Studies* 43 (2009): 117–130.
- Wolcott, Victoria W. *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

## Curriculum Vitae

Kimberly M. Stanley

[kmstanle@indiana.edu](mailto:kmstanle@indiana.edu)

### Education

- 2015                      Indiana University–Bloomington, Indiana  
Doctor of Philosophy, Department of History  
Doctor of Philosophy, Department of American Studies  
Advisor: Claude Andrew Clegg III
- 2000                      University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM  
Master of Arts, American Studies  
Advisors: Gerald Davis/M. Jane Young
- 1990                      Gannon University, Erie, PA  
Bachelor of Arts, Communication Arts  
Advisor: A.J. Miceli

### Dissertation

“Pulling Down the House and Tearing Up the Yard: Constructing, Policing and Containing Black Masculinity, 1920-1960,” Professor Claude Clegg, Chair; Professor Matthew Guterl, co-Chair.

### Awards and Fellowships

- 2013                      The College of Arts and Sciences Travel Award
- 2013                      Frederick W. & Mildred C. Stoler Research Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington
- 2012                      Wiseman Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington
- 2011                      McNutt Professor Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington
- 2010                      Wiseman Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington
- 2007                      Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington
- 2003                      American Studies Graduate Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington
- 2003                      Department of History Admission’s Fellowship, Indiana University-Bloomington

### Publications

“Dan Burley,” in *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*, ed. Steven C. Tracy, University of Illinois Press, 2011.

### Guest Lecturer

- Feb. 2013              “E-Race(d) Bodies: Science, Race, and Culture,” Cultural Perspectives on Science and Technology, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN.

### Conference Presentations

“20<sup>th</sup> Century Black Periodicals: Class, Race, Progress, and Representation,” The Joint Journalism and Communication History Conference, New York University, March 2015

“Containing the Nation: Modeling Black Female Respectability in Cold War Magazines,”  
Gender, Representation in Magazines and New Media, Cornell University, October 2013

“Behind Every Respectable Black Man: The Black Press, Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, and Black Women,” 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate History Conference at the University of Memphis, Memphis Tennessee, Nov. 2011

“Racing the Field,” Ethnic Studies Research Workshop, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana February 2011

“Graduate Students of Color Teaching History to Underrepresented College Students,” The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Teaching and Learning Conference, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, England, March 2010

“Multicultural Instructors Teaching First-Generation College Students,” International Society for the Scholarship for Teaching and Learning, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University, Fall 2009.

“Jesse, Joe, and Jackie: Racing the Field,” Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 2009.

“*Duke*: Sexualizing Black Citizenship during the Civil Rights Era,” Association for the Study of African American History and Life, Alabama, October 2008

“Dismantling a Hero: Dan Burley Challenging the Social Construction of Joe Louis,” Southwest/Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 2008

“Language: What is it Good For? Exploring Feminist Epistemology in Black Women’s Narratives,” Black Women’s Studies and the Academy, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, March 2003.

“A Re-Thinking of Black Women’s Narratives: A Black Feminist Reading,” Exploring Issues and Challenges in Educational Research and Practice, College of Education Graduate Student Colloquium, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 2000.

“Untold Stories: Pioneering Black Women in New Mexico,” The Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 2000.

“Black Women: The Victims of Double Jeopardy,” A Symposium in Celebration of Women and Blacks: Gifts, Goals and Barriers. Pennsylvania State University, Behrend College, Erie, Pennsylvania, March 1986.

## Teaching Experience

### Instructor of Record

Spring 2015 L102, “Introduction to Latin@ History,” Latino Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington

Fall 2014 L102, “Introduction to Latin@ History,” Latino Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington

Fall 2012 FYS 101-59, “Hustle and Flow: Race, Gender, and Popular Culture, 1950 and Beyond,” Core Curriculum, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN

Fall 2012	GWS 303/H305, "Cancer in America: A Cultural History," Department of History and Anthropology, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN
Summer 2012	A379, "Cancer in America: A Cultural History," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington
Summer 07-09	X-153, "Critical Reading and Reasoning for the New College Student," Student Academic Center, Indiana University-Bloomington
2007–2008	L102, "Introduction to Latino/a History," Latino Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington

#### Associate Instructor/Teaching Assistant

Spring 2014	A-100, "What is America?" American Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington
Fall 2013	A-100, "What is America?" American Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington
Spring 2006	H105, "American History I," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington
Fall 2005	H106, "American History II," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington
Spring 2005	A265, "History of Gender and Sexuality," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington

#### Course Assistant

Spring 2012	A200, "The Kennedys: An American Dynasty," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington
Fall 2011	A200, "The Dating Game: Sex and Courtship in American History," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington
Spring 2007	A300, "History of the American Home," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington
Fall 2006	H105, "American History I," Department of History, Indiana University-Bloomington

#### Research and Professional Experience

2008–2011	Illustrations editorial assistant, <i>Journal of American History</i> , Bloomington, IN, (June 2008–June 2009).
	Book Room/Recent Scholarship editorial assistant, <i>Journal of American History</i> , Bloomington, IN, (June 2009–Jan. 2011).
	Book Review Copyeditor editorial assistant, <i>Journal of American History</i> , Bloomington, IN, (Jan.2010–June 2011).



Fall 2006      Co-Instructor, "GenderTalk," Community and Leadership Development Center,  
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

## **Service**

Student Representative, African American African Diaspora Faculty Search Committee, History Department, Indiana University-Bloomington, 2005.

Volunteer, Indiana Association of Historians annual meeting, Bloomington, Indiana, February 2007.

Social Co-coordinator, History Graduate Student Association, Indiana University, 2008.

New Graduate Student Mentor, 2008.

Organizer, "Black @ IU: What You Need to Know to Be Successful in Graduate School," Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, September 2005, September 2006, August 2007, August 2008.

Organizer, Presenter, "Collision of Two Worlds: Single-Parenting and Graduate School," Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, October 2006.

Graduate Student Representative, "National Conference on Graduate Student Leadership," University of Kentucky, Louisville, Kentucky, November 2007.

Organizer, "Tenants' Rights Program," Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, January 2008.

Organizer, "Surviving Graduate School: The Things They DON'T Tell You," Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, February 2008.

Organizer, "Going Beyond Numbers: The Recruitment and Retention of Black and Latino/a Faculty and Graduate Students," Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, March 2008.

## **Professional Organizations**

American Historical Association

American Studies Association

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

Black Scholars Collective

Organization of American Historians